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**The transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary  
special educators.**

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## Acknowledgements

### **Declaration: .....**

*There are several people whom I would like to thank for helping and supporting me through the*

This dissertation is submitted in part-fulfillment of the MA Education.

I, Carla Pinto declare that I have developed the dissertation independently with the use of the resources listed in the bibliography.

*I would like to thank my family for their moral support and prayers.*

I give full permission for this research study to be used for other research purposes.

*Also a special thanks to Paula and Pedro for helping me with translations and school visits.*

*And last but definitely not the least, I would like to thank my fellow colleagues for being a great source of reinforcement and support to me. Gonçalo for always being there and also for his advice.*

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Content List	Page
I. Title	
II. Abstract	ix
III. Acknowledgements	iv
IV. Content List	v
1. <i>Chapter 1: Introduction.</i>	1
1.1 Czech Republic education system	1
1.2 Importance of employment for adolescents with intellectual disabilities	3
1.3 My background	4
1.4 Reasons for selecting my research questions	6
2. <i>Chapter 2: Review of Literature.</i>	8
2.1 Definition of the term Transition	8
2.2 Employment situation of people with disabilities in the Indian Context.	11
2.3 Employment situation of people with disabilities in Europe in general and people with intellectual disabilities in particular.	13
2.4 Employment situation of people with intellectual disabilities in the Czech Republic.	15
2.5 My reasons for selecting people with intellectual disabilities as the main focus of my research.	15
2.6 Definition of the term intellectual disability.	16
2.7 Importance of vocational education and school to work programming for youth with intellectual disabilities.	17
2.7.1 Vocational education and training	17
2.7.2 Transition from school to work.	19
2.8 Effective transition-related practices and services.	21
2.8.1 Student-Focused Planning.	21
2.8.2 Student Development.	22
2.8.3 Collaborative System Delivery.	23

2.8.4	Family Involvement.	24
2.8.5	Program Structure and Attributes.	24
2.9	The changing roles secondary special educators and their teacher training programme.	25
2.10	Challenges or difficulties faced by secondary special education teachers while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.	28
2.11	Conclusion.	29
3.	<i>Chapter 3: Research Methodology</i>	31
3.1	Quantitative research	31
3.2	Qualitative research	32
3.3	Case study	34
3.4	Combining qualitative and quantitative research	36
3.5	Research Methods.	36
3.5.1	Checklist	37
3.5.2	Semi-structures interview.	38
3.6	Sampling strategy and participants selected for the study.	40
3.7	Validation of data	41
3.8	Ethical implications	43
3.9	Limitations of this research	44
4.	<i>Presentation of the Schools visited.</i>	45
4.1	School A	45
4.2	School B	46
4.3	School C	46
5.	<i>Chapter 4: Data Analysis</i>	47
5.1	The transition-related roles and responsibilities carried out by secondary special educators for preparing students with intellectual disabilities for employment.	48
5.1.1	Student-Focused Planning.	49
5.1.2	Student Development.	50
5.1.3	Interagency Collaboration.	51

5.1.4	Family Involvement.	53
5.1.5	Programme Structure and Attributes.	54
5.2	Challenges faced by secondary special educators while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.	55
5.2.1	Challenges that were more general in nature i.e. not specifically related to the roles and responsibilities listed out in each of the five areas.	55
5.2.2	Challenges that were specifically related to the transition-related roles and responsibilities listed out in each area to a certain area.	57
5.3	Rating the effectiveness of teacher training programme.	64
5.4	Recommendations made by secondary special educators to improve their teacher training programme.	66
5.5	Support received by the secondary special educators from the school while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.	67
6.	<i>Chapter 5: Evaluation.</i>	69
6.1	Transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators.	69
6.2	Specific challenges or difficulties faced by the secondary special educators while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.	73
6.3	Rating the effectiveness of the teacher training programme.	76
6.4	Recommendations made by secondary special educators to improve their teacher training programme.	77
6.5	Support received by the secondary special educators from the school while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.	78
6.6	Recommendations.	79
7.	<i>Chapter 6: Conclusion.</i>	81
7.1	A critical evaluation of the work undertaken, including methods and possible areas of further inquiry.	81
7.2	Implications of my research findings.	82

Bibliography	85
Appendices	91

The main aim of the research was to find out: what were the transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators while preparing youth with intellectual disabilities for employment and the specific challenges or difficulties they face while performing these transition-related roles and responsibilities. Secondary special educators were also asked to rate the effectiveness of their teacher training programme and make recommendations to improve their programme. And finally, they were asked what kind of support from the school they needed to help them perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities effectively. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in this study.

Through this study, I discovered that there exists a high percentage of secondary special educators (i.e. around 2-3%) and those who felt that they performed 20 out of the 23 transition-related roles and responsibilities for the primary students with intellectual disabilities for employment. The findings of this research also reveal the specific challenges or difficulties that secondary special educators experience while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities. 3 out of the 12 secondary special educators rated their teacher training programme as 'not at all useful' to 'somewhat useful'. Thus, most of the secondary special educators in this research did not feel as properly prepared to perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities. And finally, the findings of this research also reveal various recommendations given by the secondary special educators to improve their training programme and support their work as well as the school to help in effective transition-related roles and responsibilities performance.

**KEY WORDS:** Secondary special educators, transition-related roles and responsibilities, intellectual disabilities, teacher training programme for the secondary special educators.

## Abstract

*The main aims of this research was to find out: what were the transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators while preparing youth with intellectual disabilities for employment and the specific challenges or difficulties they face while performing these transition-related roles and responsibilities. Secondary special educators were also asked to rate the effectiveness of their teacher training programme and make recommendations to improve their programme. And finally, they were asked what kind of support from the school they received to help them perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities effectively. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in this study.*

*Through this research it has been found that there exists quite a high percentage of secondary special educators (i.e. overall 59% and above) who felt that they performed 20 out of the 23 transition-related roles and responsibilities while preparing students with intellectual disabilities for employment. The findings of this research also reveal the specific challenges or difficulties that secondary special educators experience while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities. 5 out of the 12 secondary special educators rated their teacher training programme as good and another 5 gave a rating of fair. Thus, majority of the secondary special educators in this research did not feel so poorly prepared to perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities. And lastly, the findings of this research reveal the various recommendations given by secondary special educators to improve their teacher training programme and support they received from the school in order to perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities effectively.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Transition-related, roles and responsibilities, employment, secondary special educators, intellectual disabilities, secondary education, teacher training programme*

## Chapter 1

### 1. Introduction

Most journal articles I came across regarding transition education and services usually began with information about poor postsecondary outcomes of youth with disabilities. By 'postsecondary outcomes' I am referring to the adult roles that a student is expected to carry out in his community after completing his school. Such kind of information is extremely disconcerting to me as a special educator and makes me wonder about *what is the real purpose of an educational institution?* To me, the main aim of any educational institution should be to make the student (with and without a disability) as independent as possible. The student, as a result of his education, should be equipped with the necessary skills that will help him become a fully integrated member of society. I believe it is the responsibility of the school, whether regular or special, to plan for the future for all children especially those with special needs. Benz and Halpern 1993 (cited in Goupil, G. et al. 2002) have suggested '*that the primary goal of special education should be to teach the skills that will prepare students with disabilities for a harmonious transition from school to community life. It is well documented that the degree of success in adult life for individuals with disabilities is strongly determined by the quality of education or training received during the school years.*' In this paper I will be focusing on the transition that students with intellectual disabilities make from secondary education to employment. This study is conducted from 3 special schools in the Czech Republic.

#### 1.1 Czech Republic education system

The Constitution of the Czech Republic which was passed by The National Czech Council, states in Article 3 that an '*integral component of the constitutional system of the Czech Republic is the Charter of fundamental Rights and Freedoms.*' In the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms it is stated in Article 33 that:

- '(1) Everybody has the right to education. School attendance is obligatory for a period specified by law.
- (2) Citizens have the right to free education at elementary and secondary school, and depending on the citizen's ability and the potential of society, also at university-level schools.' (Constitution of the Czech Republic).

Thus, because of the provisions laid out by the Constitution of the Czech Republic, children with intellectual disabilities within the age group 6 to 15 years of age have to attend compulsory education. The basic schools are divided into stages namely (a) the first grade comprises of the first to the fifth year, and (b) the second grade comprises of the sixth to the ninth year, which provides lower secondary education. After the completion of their compulsory basic education students with intellectual disabilities transition to upper secondary education. Upper secondary schools are generally attended by students with intellectual disabilities within the age group of 15 to 19 years of age.

There exist three kinds of upper secondary education schools in the Czech Republic namely (a) Secondary grammar or general schools, (b) secondary specialized or technical schools, and (c) secondary vocational schools. In the Czech Republic upper secondary vocational training for students with intellectual disabilities is mostly carried out in *Odborne Uciliste* and in *Prakticka skola*. The former of the two is a type of special school that provides '*less demanding vocational training with adjusted curricular*' for those students who graduate from *Zvlastni skola* (which is a special school for students with intellectual disabilities as well as multiple disabilities). The duration of the course is 2 to 3 years and is completed with a final examination. The latter is another type of special school in which students with intellectual disabilities are trained '*for simple work in an individualized manner with respect to the level of their handicap*.' (Eurydice, The information database on education systems in Europe, 2003/2004).

Thus, it is clear that transition from school to employment involves a number of stages which youth with intellectual disabilities within the age group of 14 years to 19 years of age have to go through. These students have to firstly transition from lower secondary education to upper secondary education. Once their secondary education is complete, students with intellectual disabilities have 3 choices: they can either go Odborne Uciliste or Specialni Uciliste or find employment usually in a sheltered workshop. Services at each stage need to be delivered in a systematic and effective manner in order for the student with intellectual disabilities to attain employment in the future.

### **1.2 Importance of employment for adolescents with intellectual disabilities**

This paper is concerned with identifying the roles and responsibilities that special educator's in the secondary section have to carry out in preparing youth with intellectual disabilities within the age group of 14 years to 19 years for future employment. The Division on Career Development and transition (DCDT) 2000 has a Fact Sheet which has identified and listed out a number of roles and responsibilities that secondary special educators should carry out in order to improve 'post-school outcomes' for youth with disabilities. 'Post-school outcomes' in my opinion should be a reflection of the student's stated dreams and preferences for their future. I realize that planning for work and future employment for youth with intellectual disabilities is just one of the many post school outcomes of transition planning as areas like independent living, community participation, further education etc are also considered and are of equal importance.

In my opinion although employment is not everything, never-the-less in our society it is an important part of being human as it provides us with status, income, occupation and purpose in life. The same holds true for youth with intellectual disabilities who have an equal right to be employed. To be employed implies to



*'receive a wage in relation to work done, have terms and conditions of employment, and be able to be dismissed from the place of employment.'* (Bush, T. 2003)

However, one should note that a term used especially with regard to people with intellectual disabilities is 'meaningful employment,' the main characteristics of which include *'provides a wage on which one could live; has worth to the community in which it takes place; has worth to the individual undertaking the task; provides social interaction with non-handicapped people in society.'* (Bush, T. 2003). Thus, one can see that the term employment means much more than just receiving a wage for work accomplished for people with intellectual disabilities as it involves an important social function as well. For people with intellectual disabilities attaining of meaningful employment can also come to include building up of their self-confidence and self-esteem, attaining a sense of achievement, giving a structure to their lives, gaining a certain amount of control of their lives etc.

I believe that preparing students with intellectual disabilities for employment must be a team effort, based on people trusting and relying on each other (parents, special educators, and other personnel) always keeping in mind the students and their dignity. The team must remember to look at the individual's abilities and expectations. Team members must remember to honor the strengths of each student, and build on them. The team must look beyond the disability, see the individual and ask: 'where do we go from here?'

### **1.3 My background**

In India, unlike mainstream schools, there exists no prescribed curriculum for special schools. And therefore special schools are free to plan their own curriculum. I worked in a special school for children with moderate to profound intellectual disabilities. My class was the secondary pre-vocational section which consisted of students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities of the age group of 12 to 16

years. And therefore, special schools are free to plan their own curriculum. In this class, students needed to be taught skills that were needed in order to facilitate learning at the vocational stage. Thus, this class consisted of students with intellectual disabilities who were making their way from school to some form of vocational education and training. Functional academics including concepts like time and money, functional reading and skills of daily living were taught. In my opinion, the roles and responsibilities for secondary special educator's is particularly unique and challenging as the teachers have only a few years in which to accomplish a lot with their students before they transition into the vocational stage.

Acc to Conderman and Katsiyannis (2002) '*... these teachers provide the students with their last opportunity to master basic skills, acquire essential social or functional skills, and develop efficient learning strategies.*' Thus, a secondary special educator does not only have to focus on improving academic skills of youth with disabilities but have to engage in a range of tasks to improve post school outcomes for their students. Benz, Lindstrom and Yovanoff (2000) found that research indicated that the '*achievement of academic skills (e.g. reading, math, writing, and problem-solving skills) alone is insufficient for improving post school outcomes in continuing education, employment, and independent living.*' In order to ensure that students assume '*valued adult roles*' in the society, Benz proposed that students with disabilities must also '*(a) possess knowledge and skills in functional academic and transition content areas (e.g. vocational, independent living, personal/social content); (b) be aware of career opportunities that match their interests and abilities, and (c) possess strategies for pursuing opportunities in employment and postsecondary education settings.*' (Benz et al 1997; cited in Benz, Lindstrom, Yovanoff, 2000).

#### 1.4 Reasons for selecting my research questions

I would like to answer the question '*why I feel secondary special educators need to have certain transition-related roles and responsibilities while preparing students for employment?*' The reason being that students with intellectual disabilities once they complete their education are not able to go on to further education. Once they finish their education they generally go to a vocational education and training center or a sheltered workshop which prepares them for employment. Thus, I believe that secondary special educators should have certain roles and responsibilities which equip students with intellectual disabilities with the necessary skills they can put to use when they are finally employed.

According to Klingenberg (1998) there exists extensive research conducted with regard to transition-related best practices which fall mainly into 2 categories namely '*(a) theoretical papers discussing assumed best practices and (b) research papers identifying supposed best practices via studies of theoretical papers and via surveys of directors of transition programs.*' However, I believe, such theoretical information, although important is not sufficient. What is highly questionable, and which is one of my research questions is: what are the roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators *in reality* based on the DCDT (2000) Fact Sheet, and what are the challenges they face while executing their tasks. Thus, I am looking to compare the transition-related roles and responsibilities that secondary special educators *ought to* perform with whether or not they *really* perform these roles in their practice. As I believe that very often, what is stated in theory is quite different from what really takes place in practice.

I would also like to find out whether secondary special education teachers feel that the pre-service training equipped with the skills and knowledge they require to carryout their roles and responsibilities effectively. As they will be asked to rate the effectiveness of their teacher training programme on a scale of *excellent/good/fair/poor*.

As a special educator in the secondary section I felt that the teacher training I received left me unprepared to meet my student's transition needs especially with regard to family involvement. Given the diverse transition-related roles and responsibilities secondary special educators are expected to fulfill, as stated by the Division on Career Development and Transition (2000), I would like to find out from the special educator's point of view, whether she or he feels that their teacher training has enabled them to carry out their transition-related roles and responsibilities effectively or whether they feel their teacher preparation lacked in certain areas. In my opinion personnel training with regard to transition is extremely important and could be one of the factors that could lead to improving the post school outcomes for youth with intellectual disabilities.

And lastly, I will be looking at what are the supports that secondary special educators are currently receiving that enable them to carryout their transition-related roles and responsibilities more effectively. I believe that the findings of this research that will come to light will help secondary special educators seek out a variety of ways in which she can upgrade herself or himself professionally while on the job despite the fact that she or he may feel unprepared to take up the transition-related roles and responsibilities.

## Chapter 2

### 2. Literature review

The first half of this section will include:

- Definition of what I mean by the term transition.
- The importance of employment for people with disabilities by describing the employment situation of people with disabilities in the Indian context, the European context and the Czech Republic context.
- The reason for selecting people with intellectual disabilities to be the main focus of my research.

The second half of this section will include:

- Definition of what I mean by the term intellectual disability.
- The importance of vocational education and school to work programming for youth with intellectual disabilities.
- Effective transition-related practices and services.
- The changing roles of secondary special educators and the teacher training programme in the Czech Republic.
- The challenges or difficulties faced by secondary special educators while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.

#### 2.1 Definition of the term transition.

The Oxford English dictionary defines the term transition to mean '*the process of changing from one state or condition to another.*' (The New Pocket Oxford English Dictionary, 2001). When one applies the term transition to human development it is

often seen in terms of moving from one phase of life to another (e.g. moving from the infancy stage to the childhood stage, from the childhood stage to adolescence, from the adolescence to adulthood). The term 'transition' has significant importance in field of special education as over the years it has come to mean *'the movement of adolescents with disabilities from school into their next environment as young adults in the community.'* (Halpern, 1994,)

The term 'transition' has undergone several changes with regard to its exact meaning and as a result there have been a number of Transition Models that have developed over the years. According to Whetstone & Browning (2002) there exist five Transition Models and they include: The School to Work Model, Career Education Model, The Special Needs Vocational Education Model, The 'Bridges' Model and Community Adjustment Model. Each of these five models promoted their own belief of how create social inclusion for youth with disabilities in society.

The Community adjustment model of transition given by Halpern in 1985 (cited in Whetstone & Browning, 2002) is of particular importance as three of its components namely, employment, residential environment and social and interpersonal interactions have been adopted by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1990 in its definition of transition services when it speaks about community participation, community living and employment. (Johnson and Rusch, 1993 cited in Whetstone & Browning, 2002) Furthermore, this transition model is what Kohler & Field (2003) refer to a *'Transition- focused education'*. From this perspective, transition planning is seen *'not as an add-on activity for students with disabilities once they reach 14 or 16 but rather as a fundamental basis of education that guides the development of all educational programs.'* Looking at transition services from this angle represents a *'shift from disability-focused, deficit-driven programs to an education and service delivery approach based on abilities, options, and self-determination.'* (Kohler & Field, 2003).

In the U.S the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 has provided a mandate for transition services for youth with disabilities. I am aware that there exists to specific government policy related to the transition of students with disabilities in the Czech Republic. This Law requires that plans for transition be included in the students Individual Education Plan (IEP) when the student reaches the age of 16. With IDEA, transition is no longer left to chance and provides the following definition of transition services:

1) *A coordinated set of activities for a student.*

2) *designed within an outcome oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post school activities, including post secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living and community participation.*

3) *The coordinated set of activities takes into account the students preferences and interests.*

4) *and shall include instruction, community experiences, development of employment and other post school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily skills living and functional vocational evaluation."* (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, cited in NICHCY Transition Summary, 1993)

The definition of *transition* given by IDEA therefore consists of four key phrases namely '*a coordinated set of activities,*' '*outcome-oriented process,*' '*based on student's preferences and interests,*' and '*promotes movement from school to post school activities.*' The IDEA definition has definitely broadened the concept of transition to allow for a wider range of post school possibilities for youth with disabilities as it includes '*post secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported*



employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, and independent living and community participation.'

One can see through all this legislation that there exists a strong need to create philosophical and practical changes with regard to the role that education must play with regard to people disabilities inclusion in society. One of the important ways in which people with disabilities can be fully included in society is by providing them with employment opportunities. The employment situation for people with disabilities and those with intellectual disabilities in particular is will be further elaborated in the following section.

## **2.2 Employment situation of people with disabilities in the Indian context**

According to the Census 2001, there are 2.19 crore persons with disabilities in India who constitutes 2.13 percent of the total population. (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2006) The constitution of India refers to people with disabilities in two places. Article 41 of the Constitution of India has made an appeal to the Governments at all levels to '*make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of underserved want.*' (The Constitution of India). This clearly implies that approximately 50 years ago the disabled in India were seen as unproductive and unemployable however since then things have changed and the Government of India has laid down various provisions to ensure the empowerment of people with disabilities to ensure full participation in the mainstream. Some of the provisions include:

- The Rehabilitation Council Act of 1992,
- The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995, and



- The National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act of 1999. (Disability India Network)

Besides these 3 Acts there exists no other policy or plan dealing with rehabilitation of persons with disabilities except annual plans of concerned Ministries. In India unlike the U.S., which has Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990) mandate, there exists no specific legislation with regard to the transition planning of students with disabilities in India. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995 is considered to be a landmark Act in Indian Legislation. The Act contains enabling provisions for people with disabilities. Some of these provisions include:

- Every child with disability will have free education in an appropriate environment till the age of 18 years.
- Governments at different levels to take steps to equip special schools for children with *disabilities with vocational-training facilities*.
- Governments at all levels are required to formulate schemes for promotion of employment of people with disabilities providing by for i) *the training and welfare of persons with disabilities; ii) health and safety measures and the creation of a non handicapping environment in places where persons with disabilities are employed.*' (Disability India Network)

Besides Government initiatives, NGO's also play an important role in promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities in India. The largest of these NGO's is the National Center for the Promotion of Employment of Disabled People (NCPEDP). The main aim of the organisation is to '*advocate and promote equality for persons with disabilities in all spheres of life, through education, communication, appropriate training and a barrier-free environment for gainful employment.*' (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2003). Furthermore according to the ILO (2003) it is the severely

disabled and intellectually challenged that mainly depend on protected or sheltered employment which are mostly run by NGO's. The ILO (2003) states that although there exists a *legislative framework* that strives to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities, *it would appear that this framework has not yet had a significant impact on employment opportunities open to disabled job-seekers and that action is required to improve its effectiveness.*' Thus, this statement implies that such legislation lacks implementation and exist only on paper.

### **2.3 The employment situation of people with disabilities in Europe in general and people with intellectual disabilities in particular**

People with disabilities in the European Union (EU) are found to be among the most vulnerable in society as they face social exclusion, poverty and lack of employment. Disability has a very evident negative effect on the labour market participation and on employment. The conclusions reached by a Paper on The employment situation of people with disabilities in the European Union (2001) is that *'people with disabilities work fewer hours work fewer hours per week, receive lower wages than their non disabled employees and the evidence is consistent with widespread discrimination against disabled people in the labour market.'*(European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, 2001).

Several organisations such as the Organisation for economic cooperation and development (OECD), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Eurostat, Eurobarometer and others have attempted to the extent of people with disabilities in Europe. However there were several problems faced while striving to find out their number in Europe which include the lack of a standardized and fixed definition of the term disability, the various cultural perceptions of disability and lack of standardized methodologies for collecting relevant data. However despite these challenges there exists a shared view of the proportion of people with disabilities in the EU. According to a study conducted by the Eurostat (2003), it was found that the

proportion of people with disabilities was approximately 14.3% in the European Union 25(Eurostat Report, 2003). With a population of around 450 million people living in enlarged EU, the above percentage represents approximately 65 million people with disabilities. There exist several activities conducted during the European Year of People with disabilities (EYPD) 2003 that have clearly paved the way for improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The Amsterdam Treaty was considered a major turning point in the employment policy of the EU as it provided a much needed legal base and a strong permanent structure to European fight against unemployment. Based on the Amsterdam Treaty the Luxembourg Jobs Summit (1997) launched the European Employment Strategy (EES) which later became the key component in the Lisbon European Council (2003) which setup three main objectives namely, full employment, quality and productivity at work and strengthened social cohesion and inclusion. (European Employment Strategy, 2005). With regard to people with disabilities, the EES, the Commission follows a policy of mainstreaming which can be defined as '*the systematic consideration of the specific needs of disabled people which have to be respected when setting up any measures in policies aimed at the promotion of employment.*' (European Commission, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG, 2005). The reason behind the need to apply the principle of mainstreaming in policies can be found in the *Employment Equality Directive* (2000/78/EC) against discrimination which is considered a ground-breaking piece of legislation as it has and will require major changes to take place in the existing rules of all member states of the European Union.

#### **2.4 Employment situation of people with intellectual disabilities in the Czech Republic**

A detailed survey conducted on the human rights situation of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families in the Czech Republic by the Association for

Help to the Mentally Handicapped in the Czech Republic (SPMP) in co-operation with Inclusion Europe revealed that a lot more work needs to be done to fully include people with intellectual disabilities in Czech society. Besides the fact that the de-institutionalization process for people with intellectual disabilities has not yet fully begun and the outdated legislation prevents them from receiving the necessary early care and intervention they require, it has been found that *'people with intellectual disabilities are threatened with decrease in work opportunities more than anyone else in society.'* (Inclusion Europe, SPMP). Before proceeding any further it is important to define what is meant by the term 'intellectual disability.'

### **2.5 My reasons for selecting people with intellectual disabilities as the main focus of my research.**

In a report on Rights of People with Intellectual Disabilities in Romania: Access to Education and Employment (2005) it clearly states the need for comprehensive studies based on reliable data about the situation of people with intellectual disabilities in Europe (The EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the Open Society Institute and the Open Society Mental Health Initiative, 2005). The report further states that people with intellectual disabilities have to face various prejudices, significant barriers and discrimination that prevents positive change from taking place. A report on 'Intellectual Disability Organisations Committed to Fight against Poverty' shows the situation of social exclusion and poverty people with intellectual disabilities and their families face in Europe. According to the report *'they have a much higher rate of unemployment, a far lower income compared to the average population, as well as difficulties in accessing mainstream education and healthcare. Poverty and disability reinforce each other, contributing to increased vulnerability and exclusion for both the disabled individuals and their families.'* (Inclusion International: Linking local voices to global change, 2006) These are some of the main reasons why I have chosen people with intellectual disabilities to be the main focus of my research.

## 2.6 Definition of the term intellectual disability

The Open Society Institute's EU Monitoring and Advocating Programme (EUMAP) and the Mental Health Initiative have made several important contributions to research on people with intellectual disabilities. The term '*Intellectual Disability*' has been adopted by the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disabilities. Many terms, both current and historical, have been used to describe people with intellectual disabilities. Some of them include '*learning disabilities*,' '*mental retardation*,' '*mental handicap*,' '*learning difficulties*,' and '*developmental disabilities*.' (Beyer et al. 2002). The preferred term for this paper will be '*intellectual disability*' and will be used throughout the paper. There exist several widely used definitions of the term '*intellectual disability*.'

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-1V) 1994 and the International Classification of Diseases- Tenth Addition (ICD-10) 1994, use the same definition:

- 'A. *Significantly subaverage intellectual functioning: an IQ of approximately 70 or below on an individually administered IQ test (for infants a clinical judgment of clinical significant subaverage intellectual functioning).*
- B. *Concurrent deficits or impairments in present adaptive functioning (i.e. the person's effectiveness of meeting the standards of his or her age by his or her cultural group) in at least two of the following areas; communication, self care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self direction, health and safety, functional academics, work, leisure, health and safety.*
- C. *Onset is before 18 years.'* (European Intellectual Disability Research Network, 2003).

The American Association of Mental Retardation (AAMR) 2002 states that '*Mental Retardation is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour as expressed in conceptual, social and practical*

*adaptive skills. Disability originated before age 18.'* (American Association on Mental Retardation, 2002)

A shift can be seen in the 2002 AAMR version of Mental Retardation (when compared to its 1992 definition) where Mental retardation is defined in terms of adaptive behaviour rather than IQ, and basing the assessment of disability in what is accepted performance by cultural and environmental context within which the person lives. There exist 5 applications considered to be essential to the definition:

- '1) Limitations in present functioning must be considered within the context of community environments typical of this individual's age, peers and culture.*
- 2) Valid assessment considers cultural and linguistic diversity as well as differences in communication, sensory, motor, and behavioral factors.*
- 3) Within an individual, limitations often coexist with strengths.*
- 4) An important purpose of describing limitations is to develop a profile of needed supports.*
- 5) With appropriate personalized supports over a sustained period, the life functioning of people with mental retardation generally will improve.'*

(American Association on Mental Retardation, 2002)

## **2.7 Importance of vocational education and school to work programming for youth with intellectual disabilities**

### **2.7.1 Vocational education and training.**

Vocational education and training and school to work programming are considered one of the crucial elements of the employment process. The Perkins Act defines vocational education as *'organized educational programs offering a sequence of courses directly related to preparing individuals for paid or unpaid employment in current or emerging occupations requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree. Programs include competency-based applied learning, which contributes to an individual's academic*



knowledge, higher-order reasoning, problem solving skills and the occupational-specific skills necessary for economic independence as a productive and contributing member of society.' (Cited in Mupinga et al. 2004). As far as working towards improving the vocational education and training opportunities and increasing their chances of finding and keeping suitable jobs for people with intellectual disabilities, there exists a dual system in Europe: *'on the one hand it is known that a lot of information exists and that there are examples of good practice, but on the other hand it is difficult to get hold of the different pieces of know-how in one place or to be sure that the information is relevant to other regions or countries.'* (The European Knowledge Center Vocational Training and Employment for People with Intellectual Disabilities, 2004).

In order to remedy this situation the European Association of Service for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) has made the promotion of training and employment for people with intellectual disabilities one of their major themes by providing exchange of information and best practices through the LABOr Project. An important conclusion reached by the EASPD is that very often *'the skills of people with intellectual disabilities are underestimated but with the right support they can become valuable and profitable employees, ready to enter the open labour market.'* Such a conclusion therefore puts a lot of emphasis on the kind of support services that people with intellectual disabilities require to be fully included in society. Some of the employment opportunities available to people with intellectual disabilities can be grouped into a number headings which include open employment, job sharing, sheltered work employment, work experience, job shadowing and so on. Inclusion Europe, strongly believes that *'given the right job for the right person with the right supports tailored to that individual's need's, all individuals can avail of some level of real employment in a regular setting.'* (Inclusion Europe).

## 2.7.2 Transition from school to work

In Europe, the transition from school to work for youth with disabilities is gaining a lot of attention and focus given the current lack of employment opportunities people with disabilities are facing. It is helpful to note that the school to work transition system is an umbrella term and there exists no prescribed or standardized school to work Model in any legislation or in any school to work literature. Benz & Kochhar, have stated that *'states and local communities are encouraged to use existing programs within educational reform, worker preparation, and economic development efforts to build a school-to-work system that makes most sense them.'* However, they state that there exist three fundamental components that are considered basic to a school to work programme: *School-based learning, work-based learning and connecting activities.*

During the end of 1999 the European Agency carried out a review and analysis of the existing data and information at the European and international levels in the area of training and employment issues for young people with special education needs. There exist a number of International documents that proposed their own definitions to the concept of transition from school to employment or working life. Some of them include:

The Salamanca Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) states that:

*'...young people with special education needs should be helped to make an effective transition from school to adult working life. Schools should assist them to become economically active and provide with the skills needed in everyday life, offering training in skills, which respond to the social and communication demands and expectations of adult life...'*

The International Labour Office (1998) defines transition as:

*'.....a process of social orientation that implies status and role change (e.g. from student to trainee, from trainee to worker and from dependence to independence), and is central to integration into society...Transition requires a change in relationships, routines and self*



*image. In order to guarantee a smoother transition from school to the workplace, young people with disabilities need to develop goals and identify the role they want to play in society...*'(European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education,2002).

Thus, all these definitions consider transition from school to employment as an outcome oriented process that involves a variety of services ultimately leading to employment

The EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the Open Society Institute and the Open Society Mental Health Initiative (2005) report firmly emphasizes that *'providing real access to education and employment for people with intellectual disabilities in society is the key to ensuring their social inclusion, and enabling them to live and work in the community as equal citizens.'* The main reason why the Open Society Institute's EUMAP has emphasized the need to focus on education and employment with regard to people with intellectual disabilities is because it sees a strong link between the two areas namely *'without access to adequate education, people with intellectual disabilities cannot secure adequate employment.'*

Thus, teachers in secondary special education face the task of building up on the strengths and equipping the student with intellectual disabilities with the necessary skills and training that the student must put to use when employed. It is at this stage that plans about student's future vocational preference is considered. Thus the transition from secondary school to employment is an important event in the life of the student with intellectual disabilities as well as his parents as it represents the completion of the school program and the movement to some kind of employment opportunity. There exists a lot of research conducted on how to facilitate the transition for youth disabilities from school to adulthood.

## **2.8 Effective transition-related practices and services.**

There exists a large amount of research concerned with providing students with disabilities the best transition services possible. Research studies have focused on identifying factors that facilitate the transition from school to adulthood and developing some recommendations or guidelines for providing effective transition services. Kohler and her colleagues developed a Taxonomy for Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996) that provides a comprehensive framework upon which a Model for planning, organizing and evaluating transition services and programmes can be developed and delivered. Kohler and her colleagues developed this taxonomy after *'several investigations that reviewed research literature, evaluation studies and model transition project outcomes.'* (Kohler & Field, 2003). The research findings were summarized and organized into five main categories namely student-focused planning; student development; interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration, family involvement; and program structure and attributes (Kohler, 1996; cited in Kohler & Field, 2003). In the following sections, each of the five categories will be discussed and recent literature summarized with regard to these practices.

### **2.8.1 Student-Focused Planning**

Key to the transition planning process is an approach is student-focused planning. It is a concept that places the individual with special needs in a leadership role during the transition planning and service delivery process. It can be said that the ultimate goal of student-focused planning approach is to create supports and opportunities that enable a person with special needs to experience a self-directed life.

*'An important aspect of student-focused planning is that educational decisions are based on students' goals, visions, and interests; thus it is important to facilitate development of the student's self-awareness and use this information to set short-and long-term goals.'* (Kohler & Field, 2003). One of the ways in which student-focused planning is reflected is in

the development of an appropriate Individual Education Plan (IEP) by the teacher in partnership with the student as well as the parents and family. All planning and developing of the IEP should be based on relevant assessment information. The purpose of transition assessment is extremely important as it helps make clear the strengths and weaknesses that the student with disability possesses and this determines the course of study and community/vocational experiences that the student will need to be successful in post school goals.

### 2.8.2 Student Development

There exist a number of key practices included in the category of student development namely employment, life, occupational skill development through school-based and work-based learning experiences, student assessment and accommodations that need to be made available for the student. (Kohler & Field, 2003).

*'Self-advocacy and self determination both grew out of the work on normalization and dignity of risk.'* (Nirje, 1972; cited in Field et al.) If the primary goal of special education and education at large is to ensure better results in employment and community living, then it is important that the concept of self-determination should run through the entire transition process for youth with intellectual disabilities and be made an integral part of the IEP.

According to Field 1997 (cited in Case, 2004) teaching of self-determination have its roots in the career development and transition movements. Self-determination skills can benefit students with intellectual disabilities and what is important to pay attention to is that the manner in which self-determination is encouraged needs to be tailored to meet the needs of each individual. Self determination is just as important for youth with severe intellectual disabilities as it is for youth who have more mild intellectual disabilities. Thus, self determination is an important concept as it

represents a shift from seeing special education as a charitable activity to a human rights issue and furthermore represents a shift from helping youth with disabilities through vocational education and training to get jobs to providing them with appropriate support necessary for them to choose and explore their own career paths.

### 2.8.3 Collaborative System Delivery

According to IDEA (1990), the transition team members should comprise of the IEP meeting members (e.g. the students classroom teacher, a school representative and the parents) and a representative of adult agencies. IDEA emphasizes the importance of inviting the students to the transition meetings (NICHCY Transition Summary, 1993). According to Dunst and Bruder 2002 (Cited in Morningstar, 2006) interagency collaboration involves a number of activities namely: a) *Networking* which involves the IEP team members to identify the various services available in the community and contact these community services; b) *Service Coordination* which involves the IEP team members to work together with the community services and coordinate activities amongst each other; c) *Collaboration* which involves IEP team members and outside agencies engaging in shared decision-making, accountability and trust where each member is allotted a certain responsibility and time frame within which to carryout the task; d) and, *Cooperation* which involves all members of the transition team pooling in resources and working as one entity.

The need for interagency collaboration is based on the fact that youth with disabilities in transition have complex support needs and the no educational personnel or agency alone has all that is needed to plan and provide comprehensive transition services. Wehman 1990 (cited in Grigal et al. 1997) stated that '*Transition programs cannot be developed exclusively by the school system. Other agencies and the community as a whole must be involved.*'

Devlieger and Trach 1999 (cited in Kohler & Field, 2003) found that interagency collaboration, if carried out well for youth in transition and their families, is an extremely important factor that helps facilitate achievement of transition goals.

#### **2.8.4 Family involvement**

There has been a lot of research conducted on the importance of family involvement in the transition from school to adult life for youth with disabilities and according to Kohler & Field (2003) practices that consider family involvement focus mainly on three aspects in particular namely (a) participation and roles, (b) empowerment, and (c) training. Sales et al, 1991 (cited in Morningstar, et al. 1995) stated that parent participation is considered to be one of the most important elements of transition programs for youth with disabilities. In the study conducted by Morningstar et al 1995, when asked, students want the involvement of their parents and extended families in helping them plan for their future. Wehmeyer, Morningstar, and Husted 1999 (Cited in Katsiyannis & Zhang, 2001) parents can provide '*additional insight about the student on a personal level and can share their own concerns and problems about the transition.*' However, they further reported that most parents are not active participants in the transition planning process.

#### **2.8.5 Program structure and attributes**

It is important for a schools program structure to be developed on the basis of the transition-focused education and services it provides. A program structure includes features such as the schools philosophy, planning, policy, evaluation and resource development (Kohler & Field, 2003). Schools that promote outcome-based education work towards systematically involving the community in the process of developing educational options and providing learning opportunities, encouraging students to take part in the schools social life and raising their expectations with regard to skills,



values and outcomes for all students (Edgar & Polloway, 1994; cited in Kohler & Field, 2003). Thus it is the structures and attributes of the school that provide the framework upon which transition-focused education and services are implemented.

## **2.9 The changing roles secondary special educators and their teacher training programme in the Czech Republic.**

Secondary special education is clearly undergoing major changes with regard to enabling youth with disabilities make the transition from school to adult life. In the field of special education there has been a shift from '*input-based to outcome-based objectives*.' (Moses, 2005). This implies that schools are not merely required to provide educational services for students with disabilities but they should strive to ensure that the results of services are beneficial to the students and will enable them assume valued adult roles in society. Thus, reform in the secondary special education system has inevitably led to new roles and responsibilities being assigned to secondary special educators practicing both in special schools and mainstream schools. Researchers have urged a need to define the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers as part of an action agenda to encourage high-quality teaching and to facilitate the transformation that is already underway in special education (Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002)

Based on the Kohler's (1996) *Taxonomy for Transition Programming* described above, the Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) developed '*transition-related skill development for secondary special educators*.' (DCDT, 2000). Under each of the five main categories in the Taxonomy (i.e. Student-Focused Planning, Student Development, Collaborative systems delivery, Family involvement and Program Structure and attributes), the DCDT has identified certain roles and responsibilities that secondary special educators are expected to fulfill. The DCDT's main intention of listing out these roles and responsibilities was to ensure the professional development of educators either through pre service or in service training.

According to Eurydice (2006) National Summary sheets on the educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms, with regard to the Czech Republic there exist a new Act on Educational Staff regulates and which points out the necessary teacher training or 'prerequisites' that is required for special educators. The parliament of the Czech Republic resolved Act No. 563 on '*Pedagogical Staff and on the Amendment to Some Other Acts*' in 2004 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports). This Act has pointed out professional qualification requirements for special educators teaching in lower secondary of basic school and those teaching in upper secondary education in the Czech Republic. In section 8 of this Act it is stated that

*'A teacher of the secondary level of basic school who teaches in a class or at school established for children with special educational needs will require professional qualifications through*

*(a) higher education by completing an accredited Master's study programme in the field of pedagogical sciences focused on special education needs teachers; or*

*(b) education specified for teachers of the second level of basic school...and higher education by completing an accredited bachelor's study programme in the field of pedagogical sciences focused on special educational needs or by completing a programme of life-long learning organized by a higher education institution and focused on special educational needs.'*

And in section 9 of the above Act it is stated that the same holds true for a secondary school teacher who teaches in a class or at a school for children with special education needs as they are expected to acquire professional qualifications '*through education specified for secondary school teachers under sub-sections 1 through 5 and through higher education by completing an accredited bachelor's study programme in the field of pedagogical sciences focused on special educational needs or by completing a life-long learning programme organized by higher education institution and focused on special educational needs.*' (The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports).

Appropriate pre-service training plays an important role equipping secondary special educators with the knowledge and skills they require in carrying out transitional activities for youth with intellectual disabilities. Morningstar (2005) has shown that special educators do not receive the appropriate pre service training they require to carry out their transitional roles and responsibilities effectively. Blanchett, 2001(cited in Morningstar et al., 2005) has found in a survey that *'almost half of the secondary special education teachers surveyed reported being unprepared to meet their student's transition needs.'* Furthermore, The council of Exceptional Children (2000) which is *'Research involving professionals and parents pinpoints areas for action to ensure quality education for children with disabilities.'* In this Report, has identified nine important factors that prevent special education teachers from engaging in *'effective, high quality instruction.'* These nine factors include, overwhelming paperwork, high caseloads, inadequate administrative and district support etc.

Grigal et al (1997) recommend that teacher education programs must prepare professionals for the realities of transition planning. Research has shown that teachers have stated that teacher training programmes should *focus less on philosophical, historical, and legal foundations of transition...* (Morningstar, 2005), thereby implying there should be less theoretical knowledge in the training programme and more practical experience added into it. Knott and Asselin, 1999 (Cited in Morningstar et al., 2005, p.2) have stated that *'teachers have reported a general understanding of transition problems, issues, and legal mandates yet they note little understanding of and experience with interagency and adult services or how best to support families.'* Furthermore, Kochhar-Bryant, 2003 (cited in Morningstar et al. 2005) have stated that *'... primary training takes place on-the-job rather than through comprehensive professional development.'*

In a nation wide study of special education teacher preparation programs conducted by McKenzie 1995 (Cited in Conderman et al, 2002), it was found that only slightly more than 20% of the programs required separate training for elementary versus



secondary special educators. However, the overall findings from this research suggest that the instructional and transitional responsibilities of S.S.E's are unique enough to warrant specialized preparation- admittedly, a definite challenge for smaller teacher preparation institutions with limited or dwindling resources.

### **2.10 Challenges or difficulties faced by secondary special education teachers while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.**

Special education teachers in today's workplace must show '*competence at teaching everything*' (Mastropieri, 2001; cited in Moses, 2005). In particular, studies have found that secondary special educators fulfill many roles and have diversified responsibilities as transition planning involves a number of teaching as well as non teaching roles such as working with students, working with parents, working with community service providers (e.g. employers), documenting of reports and so on. It has been found that secondary special educators are responsible for teaching a wide variety of skills to the students which include '*exposing students to more sophisticated content-area and learning strategy instruction and aiding with vocational training and transition planning, in addition to teaching basic skills such as reading and writing.*' (Schloss, Smith, & Schloss, 2001; cited in Moses, 2005). In my opinion, these additional roles and responsibilities that secondary special educators have to undertake is what makes their roles and responsibilities different and more challenging from their elementary school counterparts.

Research related to the various transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators and the challenges they face while performing these roles and responsibilities is very limited. Moses (2005) recommends more research needs to be done with regard to roles and responsibilities of S.S.E's and models of special education programming before the link can be made from process to outcome.

Secondary special education teachers therefore face the challenge of dealing with multiple and sometimes competing responsibilities. As Moses (2005) puts it '*if special education programs require teachers to be jack of all trades, they will be masters of none.*' According to Moses, in such a situation, teachers are more likely to detract from focusing on improving student outcome and more likely to lead to teacher attrition. There exist a number of problems that teachers face while carrying out their roles and responsibilities in the literature of special education.

Wisniewski and Gargiulo 1997 (Cited in Moses, 2005) referred to these '*organizational work conditions*' as *role conflict* which occurs when formal roles and responsibilities clash with the reality of a teacher's work life, and *role ambiguity* which occurs when teachers find they are unable to fulfill their responsibilities because of insufficient information. Besides *role conflict* and *role ambiguity*, they also experience *role dissonance* which occurs when the teachers' own role expectations differ from the expectations from others and *role overload* which occurs when teachers have more to do than is responsible (Billingsley, 2004). Such kinds of problems influence how effective a teacher is in carrying out her tasks. According to Billingsley (2004) '*poor role design stymies and prevents teachers from using their knowledge and skills*' Special educators who face these problems may not be fully certified, or they may feel that their preparation was inadequate for the job (Gersten et al, 2001; cited in Moses, 2005). In the secondary setting, these problems may be exacerbated by the common lack of sophisticated content-area knowledge on the part of special education teachers (Coleman, 2001; cited in Moses, 2005).

### 2.11 Conclusion

The transition from school to employment is indeed a stepping stone in the life of youth with intellectual disabilities and their families. Secondary education is considered to be the starting point for this journey which is made up of a number of small stages over a period of time. Transition planning is generally considered a

'team effort,' however this paper is mainly concerned with the role of the lower secondary special educator in preparing students with intellectual disabilities for upper secondary vocational education and training which is one of the stages in the students journey towards employment. To sum up this paper will be investigating the following questions:

- What are the transition-related roles and responsibilities carried out by a secondary special educator for youth with intellectual disabilities?
- What are the challenges they face while carrying out these transition-related roles and responsibilities?
- Do the secondary special educators feel their teacher training programme prepared them to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively?
- What are the recommendations secondary special educators can give to improve their teacher training programme?
- What support do secondary special educators require in order to successfully perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities?

## Chapter 3

### 3. Research Methodology

Research is a process which involves finding out how to do things better, finding out why we do things the way we do, gaining an understanding of how things work or happen and challenging our assumptions. However, the task of carrying out an enquiry is complicated by the fact that there is no overall consensus of how to conduct one's research. (Robson, 2002).

As with any research endeavor, the research problem and questions determine the type of research methodology and methods that will be used to collect data. *'Scientists and social philosophers as diverse as B. F. Skinner (1972), John Dewey (1938), and J. Habermas (1971) have emphasized that the appropriate match between research question and research methodology is an essential feature of scientific research.'* (Odom et al. 2005) This educational research paper will be based on a qualitative research paradigm. A paradigm can be defined as that which *'embodies the particular conceptual framework through which a particular interpretation of 'reality' is generated'* (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Methodology can basically be divided into 2 main categories: Qualitative research and Quantitative research.

#### 3.1 Quantitative research

In quantitative or fixed designs the researcher is expected to have a substantial amount of conceptual knowledge and understanding about the research topic before they begin their investigation. Thus in quantitative research, the researcher starts from a theoretical base and sets out to collect data that is inline with the theory. Quantitative research is therefore mostly applied to the natural sciences, thus, there arises a question as to whether or not it is appropriate for social sciences, especially

where people as subjects are concerned. Social scientists argue, '*quantitative research takes natural sciences as a model. However, the methods of natural sciences are not suitable for social research. People are not just natural elements but social persons, acting individuals with their own wishes, perceptions and interests.*' (Robson, 2002).

According to Robson (2002) when doing quantitative research it is important for the researcher to have a clear idea of what needs to be done with the data that is collected and the researcher is primarily engaged in a '*confirmatory task.*' Quantitative research is concerned with gathering quantifiable data (in numbers) rather than descriptive data reports. Generally researchers who engage in quantitative research tend to have a greater physical and emotional detachment from the study as compared to those engaging in qualitative research. One of the advantages of doing quantitative research according to Robson (2002) is that it tends to lessen individual differences from creeping into the research findings. However on the other hand, a relative weakness of engaging in such a research is that it prevents the researcher from capturing the subtleties and complexities of individual human behaviour.

### **3.2 Qualitative research**

It is difficult to find a definition of qualitative research that is widely accepted. According to Creswell 1998 (Cited in Imel et al. 2002), qualitative research is '*an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.*' Robson (2002) has referred to qualitative designs as being '*flexible*' as compared to quantitative designs very little is pre-determined at the start of the research and the design tends to evolve, develop and unfold as the research proceeds. Furthermore, he adds on by saying that by referring to qualitative research as '*flexible*' it also provides the researcher with a certain amount of freedom to make use of methods



that will result in data in the form of numbers (quantitative) as well as in the form of words.

Qualitative research can be conducted for a number of purposes, however the widely cited report from the National Research Council states that the purpose of qualitative research is to answer the questions 'What is happening?' and 'Why or how it is happening?' I agree with Clough and Nutbrown (2002) when they say that in social science and education the purpose of doing research is not so much to prove things-but more to investigate questions and explore issues. Hull 1997 (Cited in Imel et al. 2002) has stated his opinion on what the purpose of qualitative research should be. According to him, *'the purpose of qualitative research is to understand human experience to reveal both the processes by which people construct meaning about their worlds and to report what those meanings are.'*

One of the main reasons why I have chosen the above qualitative paradigm as a basis for my research is because context is the 'cornerstone' of qualitative research (Pugach, 2001). The heart of all qualitative work is 'idiographic' or based on specifics of a situation and thus by adopting such a 'conceptual framework' for my research I feel it will definitely help me gain a better and indepth understanding of the research questions I have chosen mentioned above.

Furthermore, I would find out and explore through this study the attitudes, opinions, challenges that secondary special educators face while preparing youth with intellectual disabilities for employment. Qualitative research has an interpretive element which I feel is essential for my research as it will enable me to collect data from the participant's perspectives and understand the participant's current situation from his or her frame of reference as well as the meaning they have constructed of their experience. According to Lee et al. 1999 (Cited in Imel et al. 2002) *'at the heart of qualitative research, the authentic voice of the study's participants must be represented.'*

### 3.3 Case study

A case study is considered to be one specific form of qualitative research. The main purpose of case studies is that they 'strive to portray *'what it is like' to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and 'thick description'....of participants' lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for, a situation. Hence it is important for events and situations to be allowed to speak for themselves rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by the researcher.'* (Cohen et al. 2005). The case study as a form of qualitative research tends to follow the interpretive tradition of research and thus will enable me to see things from the eyes of the teachers, as opposed to the quantitative paradigm, however, according to Smith 1991 (cited in Cohen et al. 2005) this might not always be the case.

There exist several types of case studies. Stake 1994 (cited in Cohen et al., 2005) has stated there are three types of case studies which include;

- *intrinsic case studies* (such case studies seek to understand a case that is being researched),
- *instrumental case studies* (such case studies examine a particular case in order to gain some insight or theory) and
- *collective case studies* (such case studies involve groups of individual's, rather than one particular case, and the research is carried out in order to get a fuller picture of the questions being researched).

In this research I will be doing a collective case study which focuses on group of 12 secondary special educators who are mainly responsible for teaching students with intellectual disabilities who fall within the age range of 14 to 19 years in the Czech Republic in order to gain a fuller picture of my research questions.



One of the main reasons why I have chosen to do a case study is because of its strength lies in its ability to allow *'the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work.'* (Bell, J. 1993). Furthermore, case study can further establish *'cause and effect'* (Cohen et al. 2005) and thus can enable me to find out why certain occurrences are taking place within a context.

Nisbet and Watt (cited in Cohen et al. 2005) have listed out certain areas that researchers should avoid while analyzing data using the qualitative approach which I consider very important points to keep in mind while analyzing my data. Some of the areas which they have listed out include:

- *Journalism*: involves paying attention to only significant features of the case and ignoring others.
- *Selective reporting*: in such a case, the researcher will choose only evidence that supports his particular conclusion and ignore the rest of the data.
- *Blandness*: involves unquestioningly accepting the participant's views and opinions or only paying attention to certain aspects where participants agree rather than on those which they disagree on.

Moreover, information is collected through various means, with data evolving from observation, interviews or document analysis (Robson, 2002). In this research data was collected mainly through interviews and checklist. Thus, the data collection involved a process of combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Observation as a method was not used as I feel it was not relevant to this research. The research questions are geared towards finding out the opinions and views of the secondary special educators, and these views and opinions cannot be observed.

### **3.4 Combining qualitative and quantitative research**

According to Robson (2002) there exist several advantages when a researcher attempts to combine qualitative and quantitative research. Multiple methods can be used to address different but complimentary questions within a study rather than just focusing on a single specific research question. This tends to focus on the use of different methods for alternative tasks. Furthermore, using multiple methods can also be used to enhance interpretability as one method can be used to support another method. For instance, a qualitative research account can be greatly enhanced by quantitative evidence used to provide added support or perhaps clarify the account.

I agree with Paton 1990 (cited in Hill & Newmark, 2003) when he stated that the choice of research methodology needs to depend context and circumstance. According to Paton *'Rather than believing that one must choose to align with one paradigm or the other, I advocate a paradigm of choices. A paradigm of choices rejects methodological orthodoxy in favour of methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality. The issue is whether one has made sensible methods decisions given the purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available. The paradigm of choices recognizes that different methods are appropriate for different situations.'*

### **3.5 Research Methods**

After having decided on the research methodology that I will be using as a framework for my research the next step is discussing what methods I have selected to collect my data. Selecting of research methods helps make methodology more concrete.

### 3.5.1 Checklist

The secondary special educators were handed out a checklist consisting of relevant roles and responsibilities that secondary special educator's and participants asked to tick mark the roles and responsibilities that that they feel they carryout in the classroom while preparing youth with intellectual disabilities to make the transition from school to employment. The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) developed a Fact Sheet that summarizes a list of practices that fall under five main headings which include Student-Focused Planning, Student Development, Interagency collaboration, Family Involvement and Programme Structures and Attributes. These practices according to DCDT (2000) '*form a foundation for transition-related skill development for secondary special educators.*'

I used this Fact Sheet developed by the DCDT (2000) as a checklist because I felt it would provide me with a list of indicators that have previously been researched upon and therefore would form a basis upon which I can use to find out the transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators in the Czech context. All the items in the checklist however were not included into this research as I felt they were repetitive. Also, the sentences that were used in the Checklist was simplified in order to make translation from English into Czech easier for the translator. The DCDT (2000) developed this Fact Sheet in an attempt to '*help improve the post-school outcomes of students with exceptional learning needs*' and as employment is one of the post-school outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities, I felt that this Fact Sheet would be suitable to address by research questions. It was made clear to the translator who was who was assisting me to conduct the interviews with the participants that '*transition- related services*' in the checklist will imply services with regard to employment for children with intellectual disabilities for the purpose of this particular research study.

### 3.5.2 Semi-structured interview

Interview as a research method is commonly used in social research. A research interview has been defined by Cannell and Kahn 1968 (Cited in Cohen et al. 2005) as *'as a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused on him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation.'* According to Yin (2003) an interview is an important source of case study evidence mainly because most case studies are involving people. *'These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation.'* (Yin, 2003). According to Robson (2002) there exist 3 different types of interviews that can be conducted based on the degree of structure or standardization of the interview: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews.

Robson (2002) has also stated that there exist 2 kinds of questions researchers can use during interviews: closed questions where participant is asked to choose from two or more fixed alternatives and, open questions where the participant is given the freedom to reply in his or her own words thus questions involve much more flexibility. In this research semi-structured interviews were conducted. Merton et al. 1990 (Cited in Yin, 2003) has referred to this type of interview as a *'focused interview'* where respondents are interviewed for a short period of time. For example, in this case participants were interviewed for approximately an hour. In such cases probing and leading questions are needed.

A semi-structured interview was conducted once the teachers completed the checklist. In my qualitative research, I formulated open-ended questions for the teachers before hand. The questions were the same for all teachers. The questions that were prepared for the teachers before hand were as follows:

1. What are some of the challenges or difficulties you face while carrying out your roles and responsibilities with regard to each of these 5 areas namely Student-Focused Planning, Student Development, Interagency Collaboration, Family Involvement and Programme Structure and Attributes?
2. Can you please rate the effectiveness of your teacher Training on the scale of *excellent/ good/ fair/poor*.
3. In which of the above 5 areas do you feel your teacher training helped you and in which areas do you think it did not?
4. What are some of the recommendations you would make to improve your Teacher Training?
5. What support did you receive from the school that you feel is important to help you carry out your transition-related roles and responsibilities effectively?

A questionnaire could also have been an alternative to collect data. However, the main purpose for using semi-structured interviews as a tool was to enable me to not only obtain specific information from the teachers and but also to provide me with the reasons behind their answers. Although I had formulated certain questions for the teachers before hand, I needed to ask several additional questions during the interview based on the responses they gave me, and thus I felt that by selecting semi-structured interviews I would receive the flexibility I require to gather relevant data. According to Cohen et al (2005) some of the benefits of conducting such standardized open-ended interviews include:

- Increases the possibility of comparing responses of participants since all participants answers the same questions.
- Data on the topics addressed in the interview will be complete for each participant.
- Facilitates the organisation and analysis of data.



Along with the advantages there also exist certain disadvantages that researchers must be aware of while choosing interviews as a tool to collect data such as the difficulty to rule out bias, the fact that conducting interviews are time consuming and the difficulty to create rapport. Considering my limited experience with interviews I relied heavily on the practical guidelines of Robson (2002). I used the advice given by Robson (2002) on '*Questions to avoid in interviews*' where it is stated that while conducting interviews, researchers should refrain from using certain kinds of questions such as long questions, double-barrelled questions, leading questions and questions that involve jargon.

### **3.6 Sampling strategy and participants selected for the study.**

In this research *non-probability samples* was used as it involves the '*researcher targeting a particular group, in the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population; it simply represents itself.*' (Cited in Cohen et al. 2005). Non-probability samples are frequently used in small scale research which involves for example, one or two schools or a particular group of teachers. Furthermore, the above mentioned sampling strategy is found to be mostly used for ethnographic research, action research or case study research.

There exist several types of non-probability samples however for the purpose of this research study purposive sampling was used to select participants involved in the research. Purposive sampling occurs when the researchers '*handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs.*' (Cohen et al. 2005). Thus based on the above definition the sample that has been selected has a specific purpose. The participants involved in this research study were chosen before hand. The participants included 12 secondary special educators teaching students with intellectual disabilities at the secondary education level.

My main reason for selecting this particular category of special educators is due to the fact that these teachers were mainly responsible for teaching students with intellectual disabilities who fall within the age range of 14 to 19 years. The transition from school to employment begins primarily when the student reaches 14 years where the special education teacher has to begin considering and making plans with regard to the student's future employment.

### **3.7 Validation of data**

No matter which research tradition is followed, the quality of the research is essential if the findings are to be credible and usable. Qualitative research has been criticized for the absence of rigor in terms of the quantitative standards of assuring reliability and validity. However, according to Imel et al 2002 *'quantitative research is not synonymous with objectivity and qualitative research with subjectivity. Both research approaches have a degree of subjectivity because both are influenced by human decisions. Each method must be judged against the standard of what it claims to accomplish.'* Robson (2002) has pointed out that there exists a difference in the terminology preferred by qualitative and quantitative proponents. The term such as validity and reliability are avoided by proponents of qualitative research and instead for example Lincoln and Guba 1985 (cited in Robson, 2002) prefer to use similar guidelines for qualitative research such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

In research related to fixed designs, threats to validity are taken care of in advance as part of the design process. However in flexible qualitative designs, threats to research validity are taken care of while the research process is in progress by using evidence which the researcher has collected while he or she is in the process of developing a tentative account. In this research semi-structured interviews with each of the teachers were conducted with the help of an interpreter. An interpreter was needed as the teachers did not speak any English thus, language proved to be an obstacle in collection of data using semi-structured interviews. For this reason, an interpreter



was present at all interviews in order to translate into English the responses of the teachers.

The interpreter was briefed about the nature and purpose of the research being conducted and the procedure that needed to be followed during the interview. Furthermore, before the interviews were conducted the basic questions that I had prepared in advance for the teachers were given to the interpreter in an attempt to clarify any doubts or questions she might have regarding the same.

During the interviews, whenever I felt I had not fully understood a concept, idea or point being made by the interpreter, I made an attempt to summarize my understanding of what she has said in order to clarify my doubts. Furthermore the checklist that was given to the teachers was translated into Czech. Each item listed in the checklist was discussed with the interpreter and examples were given when necessary in order to ensure that the interpreter has fully understood the sentence so that she makes an accurate translation.

Furthermore, in order to establish credibility for this research, peer debriefing and support as a measure was used. Peer debriefing can be defined as *'having a colleague or someone familiar with the phenomena being studied review and provide critical feedback on descriptions, analyses, and interpretations or a study's results.'* (Brantlinger et al. 2005). In this research, a colleague who was familiar with my research was asked to provide her critical feedback on *descriptions, analyses, and interpretations* during the research process in order to detect areas that involved researcher bias. Furthermore the support received from my colleague served what Robson (2002) terms as a *'therapeutic function'* as well.

I am aware of the fact that researchers using flexible qualitative designs need to pay a lot of attention to the ways in which they can make their research methods and

research practices reliable. According to Robson (2002) *'this involves not only being thorough, careful and honest in carrying out the research but also being able to show others that you have been.'* Robson suggests using audit trials as a strategy to achieve this. Audit trial involves keeping *'a full record of your activities while carrying out the study. This would include your raw data (transcripts of interviews, field notes, etc), your research journal, and details of your coding and data analysis.'* As mentioned earlier, each of the interviews were voice/tape recorded and after each interview, transcriptions were made which were examined for emerging themes, ideas, concepts, and events that addressed the research questions. Transcribing refers to preparing *'the interview material for analysis, which commonly includes a transcription from oral speech to written text.'* (Cohen et al. 2005). Furthermore, the interview is a *'social encounter'* and not only a tool for collection of data and thus attempts were made to transcribe just the data rather than the conversations that took place during the interview that were not relevant to the research questions. While making the transcripts if there arose any statements that I felt needed further clarification or that I felt I had misunderstood during the interview. I made a note of it and put forth my doubts to the interpreter either on the same day or the next day either in person or via the phone. A conscious attempt was made on my part to contact the interpreter either on the day on the interview took place or the next day to clarify my doubts inorder to avoid the possibility of the interpreter forgetting the specific point that I needed to get clarified.

### 3.8 Ethical Implications

Besides ensuring data is credible and trustworthy, there are certain ethical considerations in qualitative research that are important. Ethical considerations tend to lurk in any research involving people and thus as a researcher, I was aware that interviews have an ethical dimension that needs to be considered. According to Cohen et al (2005) researchers need to be aware of three main areas of ethical issues with regard to interviewing: informed consent, confidentiality and the consequences of interviews. All the participants involved in the research were first given a small

introduction about myself and were briefed about the purpose of the interview in order to make the participant feel more at ease. The participants were also informed about what would be expected out of them during the interview. Participants were assured that they would remain anonymous in the written reports of the research and that their responses would be treated in the strictest confidence. All information that was gathered will be used for this research. Participants were asked for their permission to voice/tape-record the interview before the interview was conducted.

### **3.9 Limitations of this research**

There were several limitations to this study that need to be brought to light. These limitations include the following:

- (1) Firstly, this study relied on teacher self-report. Therefore, participant's responses reflect their own opinions and views on their transition-related roles and responsibilities, the various challenges on the job and their levels of satisfaction of their teacher training programme. Thus the responses that are obtained from this study are very subjective in nature.
- (2) Secondly, this research involves a non probability purposive sampling strategy. Such a sampling strategy fails to represent the wider population and '*it is deliberately and unashamedly selective and biased.*' (Cohen et al., 2005). Thus, generalizability of the conclusions reached in this research study is limited to the group of participants selected.
- (3) Thirdly, all of the interviews were conducted with the help of a translator. During the interview I felt a lot of information that was being given by the secondary special educators, was lost in the translation process.
- (4) Fourthly, the transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators listed out in the checklist only provides a broad picture of transition-

related roles and responsibilities, but does not capture specifics. For example, from the interviews we know that secondary special educators perform various roles, but we do not know what the roles entail or how they perform these roles. This took place due to the limited time frame within which this research project needed to be completed.

#### **4. Presentation of the schools visited.**

In this research 12 secondary special educators were interviewed. 3 of the secondary special educators were interviewed from School A, 3 of the secondary special educators were from School B and 6 of the secondary special educators were from School C.

##### **4.1 School A**

This school is attended by children with specific educational disorders (which include dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and concentration disorders), children with intellectual disabilities and those with combined disorders and light cerebral dysfunction. Each of the 3 special educators that were interviewed taught students with intellectual disabilities who were within the range of 17 to 19 years of age. The lessons concentrate on everyday life where the student learns simple practical skills. It was emphasized by the Director of the school that the school was not a job training school but it prepares children for practical life, especially family life. The lessons imparted in the school concentrate on balanced development of the students. It is a 2 year programme with a final exam.

## **4.2 School B**

School B is a private school for children with intellectual disabilities. The main aim of the school is to help persons with intellectual disabilities and their families and to support all the activities that would improve their living conditions and their status in the community. Furthermore, the school aims at developing the student's personality, adaptability and family and social integration. Each of the 3 special educators that were interviewed taught students with intellectual disabilities who were 14 or 15 years of age.

## **4.3 School C**

School C is a private school for children with specific educational disorders (which include dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and concentration disorders), children who have an intellectual disability, hearing impairment, autism, children with multiple disabilities. This school caters to students from 6 years to 26 years of age. Each of the 5 of the secondary special educators that were interviewed from this school had students with intellectual disabilities who were 14 or 15 years of age. 1 of the secondary special educator from the school had students with intellectual disabilities in his class who 18 or 19 years of age.

## Chapter 4

### 5. Data Analysis.

Qualitative data analysis is a process of making sense of data. This process includes organizing, reading, and dissecting data according to emerged thematic categories or a set of predetermined questions, eliciting recurring themes within the data collected, refining emerged concepts and themes with specific details through the process of data reduction, synthesizing and integrating these themes, and deciding what to share with the pertinent community of readers. It is a common claim that qualitative research is inductive in nature. In this research an inductive analysis strategy was adopted which involves the '*(process of reasoning from specific to general) in that certain contexts or small numbers of individuals are studied before theories (explanations, hypotheses) are developed.*' (Brantlinger et al. 2005). While engaging in inductive analysis, it became important for me to read and re-read research data to discern emerging categories and the relationships among such categories.

The data collected has been organized into 5 main sub headings which include:

5.1 The transition-related roles and responsibilities carried out by secondary special educators while preparing students with intellectual disabilities for employment.

5.2 Challenges faced by secondary special educators while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.

5.3 Rating the effectiveness of teacher training programme.

5.4 Recommendations made by secondary special educators to improve their teacher training programme.



5.5 Support received by the secondary special educators from the school while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.

### **5.1 The transition-related roles and responsibilities carried out by secondary special educators for preparing students with intellectual disabilities for employment.**

The Fact Sheet developed by The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) 2000, was used as a basis to find out the transition-related roles and responsibilities of the secondary special educators in special schools. The Fact Sheet summarizes a list of practices that fall under five main headings which include (i) Student-Focused Planning, (ii) Student Development, (iii) Family Involvement, (iv) Interagency Collaboration, and (v) Programme Structures and Attributes. The secondary special educators were requested to tick mark the roles and responsibilities under each of the categories that they feel they carry out while preparing students with intellectual disabilities for employment. The findings under each of the five categories will now be presented.

#### **5.1.1 Student-Focused Planning**

In Chart no. 1, the 12 secondary special educators felt they performed roles 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7. However, approximately 42% of the secondary special educators interviewed in this research felt that they performed roles 4 and 5, whereas 58% felt they did not perform these roles.

The secondary special educators were asked the reason why they felt they did not perform these roles, they reported that the curriculum did not provide them with the freedom to do so. 1 secondary special educator when asked why she has not ticked roles 4 and 5 reported *'that the curriculum is given to the school by the State and so she feels she feels it is not always possible for her to do it. But she tries. For example if she thinks*



student is good at craft making then she will give more opportunities to that child than other children in the class. In that way she builds on the skills of the child.' Another reason that was given for not performing roles 4 and 5 was because secondary special educators felt that the students in their class were only 14 or 15 years and very young therefore not ready to make decisions about their future.

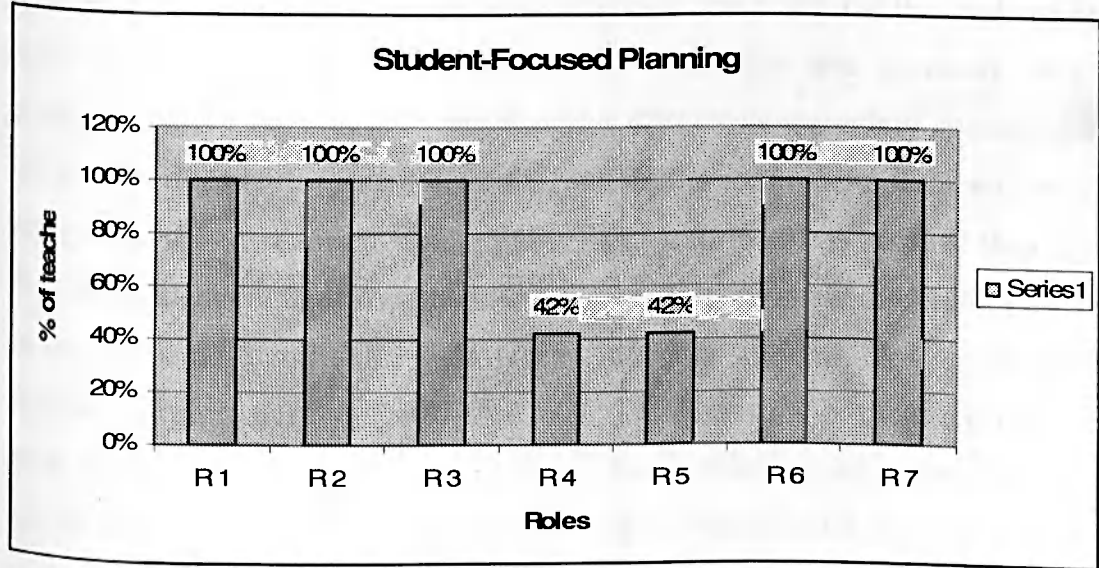


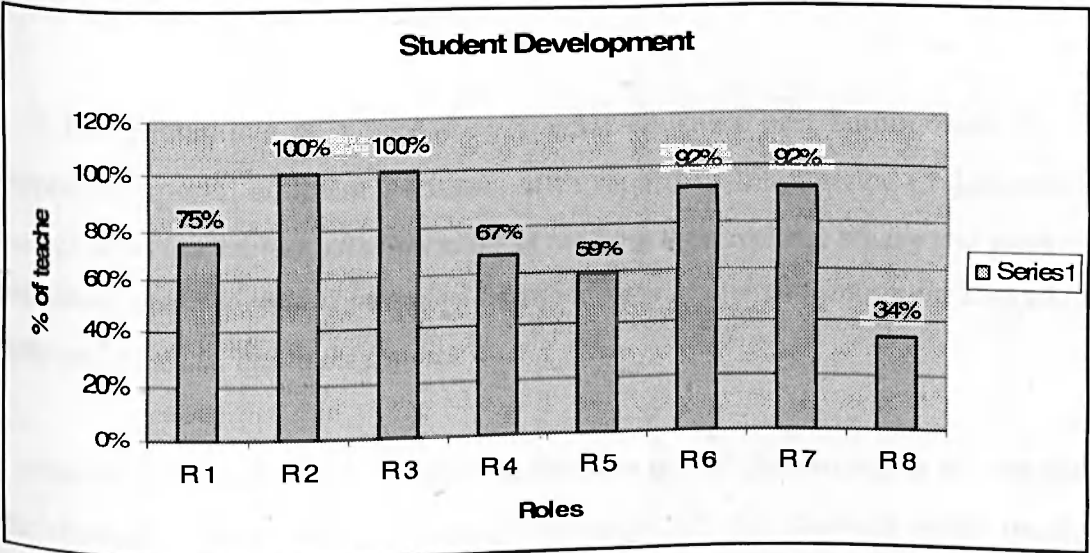
Chart no. 1: Percentage of teachers performing roles related to Student-Focused Development.

R 1	Identify and keeps a record of students learning styles, post school goals and need for accommodation.
R 2	Use assessment information to make the Individual Education Plan for the student.
R 3	Develop measurable transition related goals
R 4	Develop curricular that links/corresponds with post school objectives
R 5	Include transition related services in the Individual Education Plan
R 6	Provide opportunities for the student and family to be involved in the transition planning
R 7	Evaluate whether students have reached the goals or have not

5.1.2 Student Development

In Chart no. 2, the 12 secondary special educators that were interviewed felt they performed the roles 2 and 3. Approximately 92% of the secondary special educators felt that they performed roles 6 and 7, whereas approximately 8% of the secondary special educators reported that they did not perform these roles. 75% of them felt they performed role 1, whereas 25% of them felt they did not performed role 1 as all of the students in their class had moderate to severe intellectual disabilities and therefore very little academic skills were taught to the students. 67% of the secondary special educators felt they performed the role 4, whereas, 33% of the secondary special educators that were interviewed reported that they did not perform role 4 because they reported that the students in their class had severe moderate to severe intellectual disabilities so very little academic skills were taught in to the students. 59% of the secondary special educators felt they performed role 5, whereas 41% of them felt they did not perform the role. 1 of the secondary special educators reported that *'there are other schools where students have to be aware of their career, but not in her class.'*

Lastly, only 34% of the secondary special educators felt they performed role 8, whereas 66% felt they did not perform this role.



**Chart no. 2: Percentage of teachers performing roles related to Student Development.**

R 1	Teach academic skills that are related to the student's real life experience.
R 2	Teach self determination skills.
R 3	Teach social skills for school and work.
R 4	Teach learning strategies and study skills.
R 5	Develop student's career awareness.
R 6	Modify or change student's environment to suit his/her needs.
R 7	Teach independent living and family skills.
R 8	Provide student's with a staff member who can train and guide them.

### **5.1.3 Interagency Collaboration**

In Chart no. 3 the 12 secondary special educators interviewed reported that they felt they performed roles 1 and 2. It is important to note that all of the 12 secondary special educators stated that they do not make contact with any of the potential employers of the students in their class or with the transition consultants of other schools, but only with the transition consultant of his or her particular school. They reported that every special school as a person who has the title of a 'transition consultant' and whose main role *'is to bring family, class teacher, student and others together and plan for future of student.'*

1 of the quotation's of a secondary special educator best summarizes the role a secondary special educator performs with regard to Interagency Collaboration *'the teacher is in close contact with the child and teaching them cooking, sewing and so on and she will know what the child is interested in and is good at and will inform the consultant and make recommendations to the parents.'*

1 secondary special educator reported that one of the reasons she is not responsible for making contact with potential employers of the students with intellectual

disabilities or other schools is due to the fact that student's reports and assessments need to be kept confidential. She stated '*...school has to take care of personal information of the student and the school has to protect the information so the deputy director decides who to give this data to and sometimes a teacher cannot see some information as they can tell somebody else.*' Thus, at times it can be found that a Director or Deputy Director of a school has the dual role of a transition consultant as well. Two schools that I visited out of the 4 schools had this kind of arrangement.

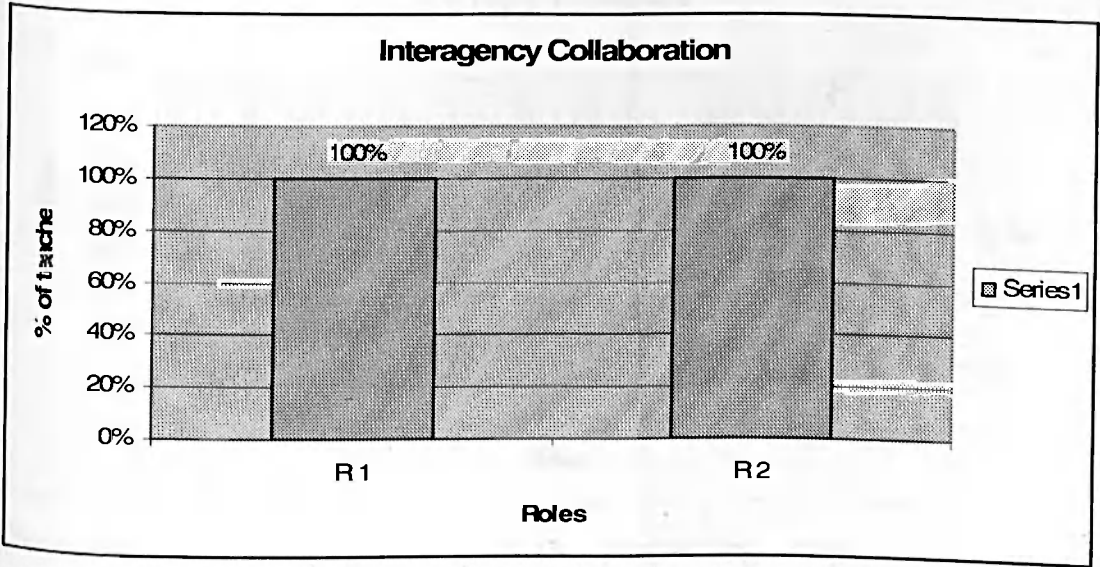


Chart no. 3: Percentage of teachers performing roles related to Interagency Collaboration.

R 1	Make contact and interact with service provider's (e.g. employers) to inform them of student's needs and support required.
R 2	Provide assessment information to the service provider's with permission of the parent's and students.

5.1.4 Family Involvement

In Chart no. 4 the 12 secondary special educators that were interviewed in this research felt that they performed role 3. It was found that just 1 secondary special educator felt that roles 1 and 2 were not performed by him. Whereas the all the other 11 secondary special educators (92%) felt that they performed roles 1 and 2.

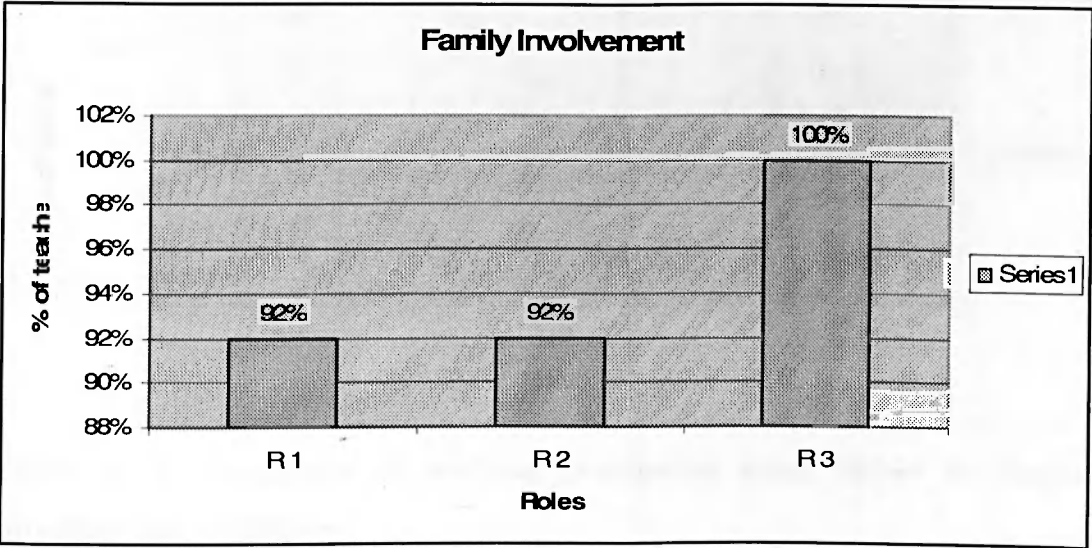


Chart no. 4: Percentage of teachers performing roles related to Family Involvement.

R 1	Provide the family with information about transition services being provided.
R 2	Involve parents in planning and decision making process.
R 3	Make sure the parents attend meetings that are related to their child's future.

5.1.5 Programme Structure and Attributes

In Chart no. 5 the 12 of the secondary special educators felt that they performed roles 1 and 3. However, 3 secondary special educators (75%) felt that they did not perform role 2.

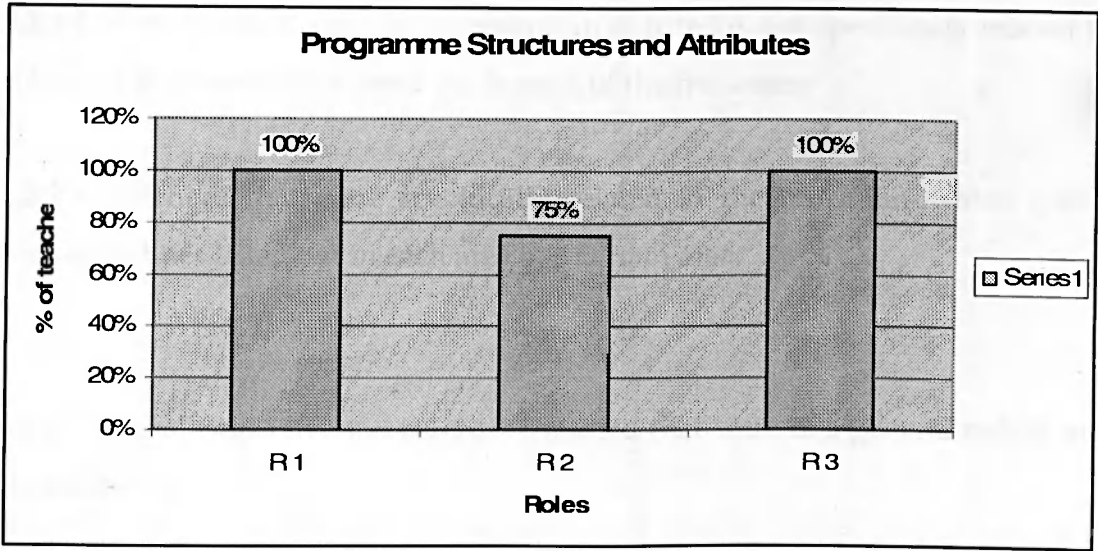


Chart no. 5: Percentage of teachers performing roles related to Programme Structure and Attributes.

R 1	Plan curricular that is flexible and meets the student’s needs.
R 2	Plan curricular that prepares a student for life after school.
R 3	Involved in development and evaluation of curricular.

5.2 Challenges faced by secondary special educators while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities

The secondary special educators were asked what were the specific challenges they faced with regard to each of the five areas mentioned in the checklist which include;



Student-Focused Development, Student Development, Interagency Collaboration, Family Involvement and Program Structures and Attributes.

The responses that the secondary special educators gave could be categorized into the following:

**5.2.1** Challenges that were more general in nature i.e. not specifically related to the roles and responsibilities listed out in each of the five areas.

**5.2.2** Challenges that were specifically related to the transition-related roles and responsibilities listed out in each area to a certain area.

**5.2.1** The challenges that the teachers reported that were of a general nature include the following:

- **Catering to the individual needs of each student in the class:**

A secondary special educator felt that *'....the big challenge is the diversity of the class'* as some of the students follow the curriculum of the basic school while others in her class with more severe disabilities require Individual Education Plans (IEP) to be made.

- **Resolving problems with 'relationships':**

According to a secondary special educator 'relationships' include *'all kinds of relationships. Relationships between the students themselves, between the classes as well the relationship between the school and the surroundings because it is not closed in itself and needs to be related to people outside the school.'* This secondary special educators response was vague and not very specific.



- **Sense of helplessness because at times, students with intellectual difficulties cannot get admission into special vocational schools once they complete their secondary education:**

After finishing of practical school a secondary special educator felt that there occurs a problem for the students when they are not able to get admission into any *'special vocational schools and there are not many institutions which such children can go to.'*

- **Having to teach students with intellectual disabilities for 33 hours a week even though it is too much for the students to cope with:**

A secondary special educator reported that *'the Minister of Czech Republic says that all children should be taught 33 hours a week even if they are mentally handicapped which is a lot for the children.'* The teacher further added that this can be challenging for her *'because the children with mental handicaps and with autism are quickly tired and because of the 33 hours a week the students have to study in the afternoon as well.'*

- **Dealing with financial problems:**

1 secondary special educator reported that *'there are a lot of problems but they are because of the families because most of the children come from divorced families, economically low so they cannot pay something and they say the father should pay or the mother should pay.'*

- **Teaching students with disabilities without an assistant:**

A secondary special educator reported that one of the difficulties she faced was the lack of a teacher assistant in the classroom which according to her is *'is the main thing they really would need.'* However she stated *'because of the finance problem they haven't*

got it.' She further added that *'the Director is very strict so the teacher has a lot to do'* with very little assistance.

Thus, we see that secondary special educators experience several challenges relating to their everyday teaching practice. These challenges arise due to a number of situations namely: dealing with the student diversity in the class, teaching students without an assistant, resolving problems related to money and relationships, teaching students for 33 hours a week even though it is difficult for the students to cope up and lastly feeling helpless because at times getting admission into a special vocational school is difficult for the students and the educators cannot do anything to better the situation.

**5.2.2 Challenges that were specifically related to the roles and responsibilities listed out in each area to a certain area include the following:**

**(1) Student-Focused Planning.**

When asked what were the specific challenges or difficulties with regard to Student-Focused Planning, six secondary special educators reported that they did experience specific challenges and difficulties. However, five of them felt they experienced no challenges or difficulties with regard to the above area.

(a) 60% of the secondary special educators reported their specific challenges or difficulties which have been categorized into the following:

- **Interpreting assessment reports of students:**

1 secondary special educator reported that at times *'when she gets the report from the former school she couldn't recognize what is really the problem because it is really subjective.'* Furthermore, 2 of the 12 secondary special educators reported that it

*'sometimes happens that the evaluation that teacher receives....about the child is not true so...'* so they have to work towards finding out the students current level of the child.

- **Spending a lot of time on paper work:**

25% of the secondary special educators that were interviewed reported that they receive a lot of information about the students in they class from assessments made by doctors, psychologists, special education centers, teachers from previous schools and so on in order to know the past history of the student. *'So the teacher has a lot of information lots of papers on the basis of which she can make an IEP....so the teacher has to involve a lot of time to this task.'*

(b) 42% of the secondary special educators reported that they experienced no specific challenges or difficulties with regard to Student-Focused Planning. One secondary special educator's reason for making the above response was attributed to her positive outlook on life *'....because Z always thinks how to better the worse situation.'*

## **(2) Student Development.**

The following were the specific challenges or difficulties reported by the secondary special educators with regard to the above mentioned area.

- **Helping children set realistic goals for themselves:**

2 secondary special educators reported that one of the challenges they faced with regard to Student Development was *'the problem of the reality view of children because they need to know that they cannot become a doctor in the future.'*

- **Teaching of self determination skills to students with profound intellectual disabilities:**

A secondary special educator reported that teaching her students who had profound intellectual disabilities was challenging. However she went on to add that *'she tries even if results for some cases don't show or takes too long.'*

- **Teaching social skills for school and work / independent living and family living skills:**

1 secondary special educator felt that these skills *'are really hard work'* as they need to be taught throughout the student's school life and these skills need *'to be repeated several times so that they (students) do not forget...'*

- **Developing student's career awareness:**

1 secondary special educator reported that *'a lot of career awareness cannot be done for children with intellectual disabilities....because the curriculum does not allow for that. The decision to choose which career for the child is with the parents in the end.'*

Another secondary special educator felt that developing student's career awareness in Basic school is difficult *'because students have to decide at an early age about future careers.'* She further added that *'most children do not know what they want to do in the future.'*

### (3) Family Involvement.

With regard to the area of Family Involvement a mixed set of teacher responses were obtained. The responses the secondary special educators gave fall into three categories which include:

(a) Specific challenges or difficulties experienced,

(b) Cooperation from parents of the students was very good and therefore experienced no specific challenge or difficulty.

(c) Couldn't say as each case is different.

(a) Specific challenges or difficulties experienced by secondary special educators in the following areas:

(i) Parents have the main say in choosing students career.

1 secondary special educator stated that *'finally the family or the parents have the main decision and not the child. It is not often that the children choose'* and the teacher can only make recommendations. And thus she reported that in such cases the *'students have to study the stuff they are not interested in.'*

**(ii) Dealing with the high expectations parents have for their children:**

34% of the secondary special educators felt that one of the biggest challenges they face is dealing with the high expectations that parents have of their children. They reported the following:

A secondary special educator reported *'that the parents can have a really high aims and just want the child to be perfect the best....and the children are not able to do it. The teacher knows the possibility and ability of what the students can do but the parents usually thinks that the child can be much better and pushes the child further even if it is wrong for the child.'*

Another secondary special educator further added that *'it's a problem to say to the parents your child is not able to do this or is not clever enough to go to his school but she (teacher) can just recommend because the decision is on the parents.*

Furthermore, another secondary special educator reported that from his experience as a teacher, it is mostly the mother's of students that are interested in the education of the student.

**(iii) Lack of parental interest in the child:**

3 secondary special educators reported that they experience difficulties when students come from homes where the parents are not interested in their education and future. They reported the following:

*'....the students come from very low economic backgrounds and so from broken families. Parents are not interested in child and corporation with the parents difficult for her.'*

*'Most of the students come from homes where mother and father are not interested in their child. The teacher try to call them for meetings but....'*

*'Most of the parents don't care coming at all (for meetings in school). Of course the teachers try but the answer is not warm.'* This secondary special educator tried to reason out why parents why parents showed such lack of interest in their child by adding *'usually they have problems with their other children as well. Some of the parents live far away in other towns so it is difficult for them to come.'*

(b) 2 secondary special educators reported that the cooperation they received from the parents was very good and they rarely experienced any difficulties in this area.



When asked whether the educators experienced any challenges or difficulties in this area of Family Involvement they replied as follows:

*'Not really. She feels when the children have severe intellectual disabilities then the cooperation of the parents is very good. This teacher however added that 'from time to time there are families who do not cooperate as well. When the families have problems they go to the Director to discuss the matter.'*

*'She feels both teachers and parents are grateful for being here (in the school) so she doesn't have any problems. They (parents) like to cooperate with the school.... there are some exceptions but they are so few that she wouldn't speak about it.'*

(c) When 2 secondary special educators were asked whether they experienced any challenges or difficulties with regard to Family Involvement they reported that they were unable say as each case is different.

*'Teacher feels it depends from parent to parent. It is very individual. Some parents don't care about the education of their child, other one will be worried too much about the child, so it depends.'*

#### **(4) Interagency Collaboration.**

92% of the secondary special educators felt they experienced no specific challenge or difficulty with regard to Interagency Collaboration; however one felt challenged in the following area:

**(i) Cooperating and coordinating activities in a team of professionals working together.**

A secondary special educator felt that *'....cooperation and teamwork with the others in the school and parents can be one difficulty.'* The teacher went on to add that *'it is challenging to be a diplomat to children, deputy director and especially parents.'*

One of the reasons why I feel the secondary special educators do not experience any specific challenge or difficulty in this area is because every special school has a person termed as a 'transition specialist' or 'transition consultant' who has the responsibility of informing the parents of various possibilities available to the student once he or she has completed his school. And then it is up to the parents to contact these schools or organisations on their own. Thus, the secondary special educators are not in contact with any of the potential employers of the students in her class or with the transition consultants of other schools, but only with the transition consultant of his or her particular school.

*'They (parents, student and transition consultant) start a discussion of what the child is going to do at the beginning of the last year of practical school.*

*The decision depends on what the child likes and it depends on the parents. Also on the ability of the child and severity of the child's mental handicap.*

*The consultant has a list of special schools students and parents can go to once they finish practical school and gives them (parents) the contacts.*

*Also gives parents contacts to a place where students can work and live there as well which is sheltered employment...so they are preparing these children for leaving school from the beginning of the year.'*

However, 1 secondary special educator stated *'that there are not many possibilities that the students can choose from when they finish school and from this small amount of possibilities they choose the better.'*

##### **(5) Program Structures and Attributes**

The secondary special educators were asked whether they experienced specific challenges or difficulties with regard to the above area all of the 12 teachers mentioned the new School Act which will be implemented by the State in 2007.

1 secondary special educator felt that she just have wait and see what new challenges or difficulties this new School Act will bring and she is sure that *'problems will come.'*

Another secondary special educator reported *'the curriculum is changing and it is interesting because for our school I think it will change in a good way. It will be compulsory to have just a frame program or structure so every school can modify lessons more according to the individual students. And the curriculum can be made more free more flexible.'*

With regard to the new School Act one secondary special educator predicted *'.... it will be challenging when they have to work out the syllabus in 2007 because this school has such a wide scope of educational systems.....it would be difficult to put together the helping, rehabilitation and vocational units in educational system.'*

##### **5.3 Rating the effectiveness of teacher training programme.**

10 out of the 12 secondary special educators had completed a special education teacher training programme, 2 secondary special educators had done a mainstream or regular teacher training programme. After having reported the specific challenges or difficulties they experienced while performing their roles and responsibilities, secondary special educators were requested to rate the effectiveness of their teacher training on a scale of *excellent, good, fair* and *poor*.

In Chart no. 6, 5 secondary special educators rated the effectiveness of their teacher training as *good*. And 5 other secondary special educators rated the effectiveness of

their teacher training as *fair*. 1 secondary special educator rated the effectiveness of her teacher training as *excellent*, whereas, whereas 2 secondary special educators rated there teacher training as *poor*.

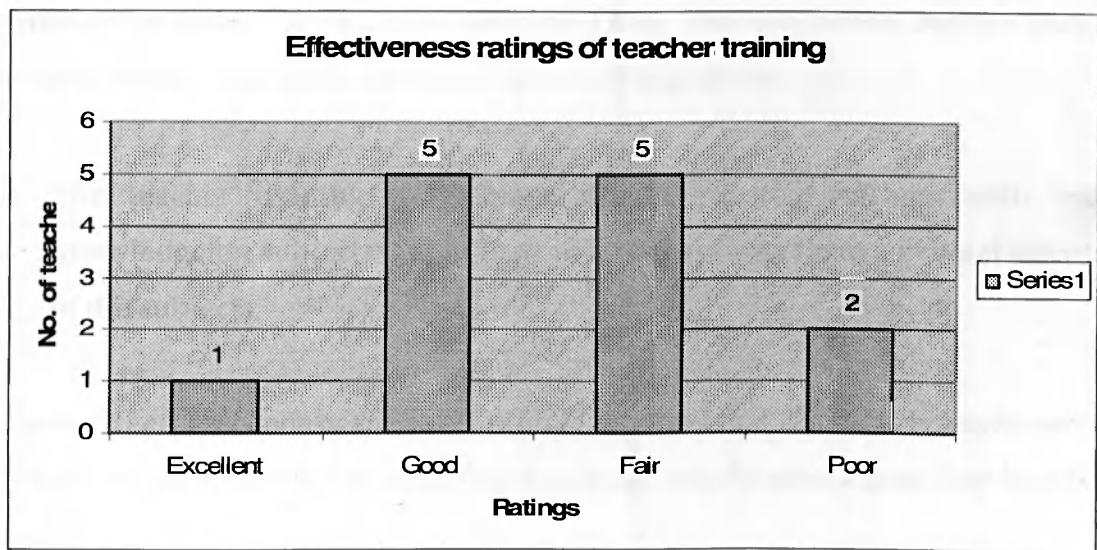


Chart no. 6: Ratings of effectiveness of teacher training

**5.4 Recommendations made by secondary special educators to improve their teacher training programme.**

When the secondary special educators were asked what recommendations they could give to improve their teacher training programme the following responses were obtained:

- There should be more practical experience included in the teacher training as it involves a lot of theory.

6 of the 12 secondary special educators reported that teacher training should provide them with more practical experience as it focused on a lot of theory.

1 secondary special educator stated *'that her specialization is with hearing impairment but she for example during her study never saw the machines (hearing aids) for the deaf...these things she saw in pictures but not in reality.'*

Another secondary special educator stated that *'some compromise between theory and practice'* needs to be made in teacher training programme.

- **The teacher training programme should provide teachers with indepth knowledge on subjects taught instead of only giving them a general orientation of the subjects.**

1 out of the 12 secondary special educators reported that *'the subjects taught were really general that she knows lots of things from a wide area but she doesn't know deep knowledge.'*

- **The teacher training programme should equip teachers with the skills related to how to work with parents of their students.**

1 out of the 12 secondary special educators felt that *'teacher training should include more on how to work with parents of students.'*

- **The teacher training programme should equip teachers with the skills related to how to work with a team of professionals.**

2 out of the 12 teachers felt that their teacher training programme *'should have more training in how to work and cooperate better with other professionals who are also involved with child like psychologist, speech therapist, consultant, parents and others.'*

### **5.5 Support received by the secondary special educators from the school while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.**

The secondary special educators were asked what kind of support did they receive from the school that helped them perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities, their responses can be categorized in the following manner:

- **Courses and seminars offered by the school in order to upgrade the teachers professionally.**

7 out of the 12 secondary special educators felt that the courses and seminars they attended helped them to carry out their transition-related roles and responsibilities more effectively. 6 out of the 12 secondary special educators reported that the school provides them with more money if they choose to attend the courses offered.

- **Support from colleagues in the school**

5 out of the 12 secondary special educators felt that the support they received from their colleagues played an important role in helping them perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities for effectively.

- **Excursions to other similar schools for children with intellectual disability, either in the same country or in another country.**

3 out of the 12 secondary special educators felt that excursions or visits to other schools for intellectual disabilities helped them learn new methods and strategies of dealing with their students in the class.



- **Engaging in self study and reading of relevant literature.**

5 out of the 12 secondary special educators read a lot of literature from books or the internet which they reported helped them perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities for effectively.

- **'Improvising' while on the job.**

1 out of the 12 secondary special educators that were interviewed felt that improvisation on the job helped her perform her transition-related roles and responsibilities more effectively. Thus she would find her own way of dealing with each new challenge that comes her way, relying on her intuition and past experience.

Thus, this chapter includes all the relevant data that was collected through the 2 methods used in this research: checklist and semi-structured interviews. The data collected was divided into categories and subcategories in order to make sense of the data that emerged from the methods used.

## Chapter 5

### 6. Evaluation

This section will include the following subheadings:

6.1 Transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators.

6.2 Specific challenges or difficulties faced by the secondary special educators while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.

6.3 Rating the effectiveness of the teacher training programme.

6.4 Recommendations made by secondary special educators to improve their teacher training programme.

6.5 Support received by the secondary special educators from the school while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.

6.6 Recommendations.

#### **6.1 Transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators.**

It was not easy for me to find relevant literature relating to one of my research question's '*what are the transition-related roles and responsibilities carried out by secondary special educators while preparing students with intellectual disabilities for employment.*' However, I found a paper by Moses (2005) on '*Roles and Responsibilities of Secondary Special Education Teachers in an Age of Reform.*' The purpose of this paper was to determine the roles and responsibilities of teachers of secondary students with Learning Disabilities (LD). This study was a quantitative study. A survey was given out to 378 high school LD teacher in Michigan State. The Survey focused on the daily work lives, their roles and responsibilities, the positions they had held and the effectiveness of their teacher training. Unlike my study which focused more on transition-related roles and responsibilities, the roles and responsibilities in this

study were more related to the subjects the secondary special educators taught, the setting and their most common activity for each period of the day.

In this research, the DCDT (2000) Fact Sheet was used as a checklist in this research to find out the transition-related roles and responsibilities of the secondary special educators in special schools. The results with regard to each of the 5 subhead headings include the following:

Chart No. 8, shows that there is no real consensus in the responses of the secondary special educators with regard to their transition-related roles and responsibilities. This is so because for some roles all the 12 secondary special educators have felt they performed the roles, whereas for other roles not all have felt they performed the roles. The lack of specific transition related legislation for students with disabilities in the Czech Republic (For example IDEA (1990) in the U.S) maybe one of the reasons for the lack of consensus in their responses. However it can be seen in Chart No. 8, that from the total number of 23 transition-related roles listed out, all of the secondary special educators (100%) felt they performed 12 roles, 92% felt they performed 4 of the roles and 59% and above felt they performed roles 4 listed out in the checklist.

However, 42% and below of the secondary special educators felt that they performed 3 of the roles listed in the checklist. These 3 roles were the least performed by the secondary special educators and they include: developing curricular that links/corresponds with post school objectives, including transition related services in the IEP and providing student's with a staff member who can train and guide them. Based on the previous chapter it was found that performing certain transition-related roles and responsibilities largely depends on certain factors which include:

	teachers		teachers		teachers		teachers		teachers
Identify and keeps a record of students learning styles, post school goals and need for accommodation.	100%	Teach academic skills that are related to the student's real life experience.	75%	Make contact and interact with service provider's (e.g. employers) to inform them of student's needs and support required.	100%	Provide the family with information about transition services being provided.	92%	Plan curricular that is flexible and meets the student's needs.	100%
Use assessment information to make the Individual Education Plan for the student	100%	Teach self determination skills.	100%	Provide assessment information to the service provider's with permission of the parent's and students.	100%	Involve parents in planning and decision making process.	92%	Plan curricular that prepares a student for life after school.	75%
Develop measurable transition related goals.	100%	Teach social skills for school and work.	100%			Make sure the parents attend meetings that are related to their child's future.	100%	Involved in development and evaluation of curricular.	100%
Develop curricular that links/corresponds with post school objectives.	42%	Teach learning strategies and study skills.	67%						
Include transition related services in the Individual Education Plan.	42%	Develop student's career awareness.	59%						
Provide opportunities for the student and family to be involved in the transition planning.	100%	Modify or change student's environment to suit his/her needs.	92%						
Evaluate whether students have reached the goals or have not.	100%	Teach independent living and family skills.	92%						
		Provide student's with a staff member who can train and guide them.	34%						

**Chart No. 8: Summary of % of secondary special educators performing transition-related roles & responsibilities.**

a) **A prescribed curriculum given by the State/age of the student with intellectual disabilities:** When the secondary special educators who had not ticked roles 4 and 5 in Student-Focused Planning, were asked why they felt they did not perform these roles, they reported that the curriculum did not provide them with the freedom to do so. Another reason given was that the students were just 14 or 15 years of age and therefore were too young to make decisions about their future.

(b) **Severity of intellectual disability:** When secondary special educators who did not tick roles 1 and 4 in Student Development, were asked why they did not perform these roles, they reported that the students in their class had severe moderate to severe intellectual disabilities so very little academic skills were taught in to the students.

However, inspite of the above reasons, there were secondary special educators who performed these roles and responsibilities. Therefore there arises a need to standardize transition-related roles and responsibilities in the Czech Republic. One of the ways in which this can be accomplished is through policy and legislation.

In my opinion, inspite of the fact that there exists no specific transition related legislation been passed by the Czech government, there exists quite a high percentage of secondary special educators (i.e. overall 59% and above) who felt that they performed 20 out of the 23 transition-related roles and responsibilities while preparing students with intellectual disabilities for employment.

Furthermore, based on the interviews conducted with the secondary special educators, I realized that the secondary education provided to student's with intellectual disabilities lacks what Kohler & Field (2003) in chapter 2 refers to as '*transition-focused education*.' For the secondary special educators in the 3 schools visited, transition services relating to employment was an '*add on*' activity, as

students employment possibilities were only discussed in the last year of his or her secondary education. And 1 secondary special educator reported that sometimes such discussions take place only a month before a student leaves school. Transition services were not seen to be the guiding force that determined the education of students with intellectual disabilities. Having a prescribed curriculum, in my opinion could one of the reasons for the above situation.

## **6.2 Specific challenges or difficulties faced by the secondary special educators while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities:**

While looking out for relevant literature relating to the specific challenges or difficulties, again I found limited literature on the topic. Wisniewski and Gargiulo 1997 (Cited in Moses, 2005) in his paper on '*Roles and Responsibilities of Secondary Special Education Teachers in an Age of Reform*' has referred to challenges that secondary special educators face relating to '*organizational work conditions*' such as *role conflict* and *role ambiguity*. Besides *role conflict* and *role ambiguity*, they also experience *role dissonance* and *role overload* (Billingsley, B. 2004). In this research however, the findings are related to *role conflict* and *role overload*.

In this research, some of the specific challenges or difficulties experienced by secondary special educators relating Student-Focused Planning include spending a lot of time on paper work. They stated that making an IEP for a student involves doing through all his or her previous assessment reports given by doctors, psychologists, special education centers etc. This finding is consistent with research conducted by The council of Exceptional Children (2000) which is '*Research involving professionals and parents pinpoints areas for action to ensure quality education for children with disabilities.*' This report has identified '*overwhelming paperwork*' as one of the nine major factors that prevent special educators from engaging in '*effective, high quality instruction.*' This report states that '*paperwork ranked as the number-one barrier to teaching.* While special education teachers recognized the importance of Individualized



*Education Programs (IEP's), they said too often procedural compliance is stressed over thoughtful decision-making, and the amount of clerical work IEP's require is prohibitive.'*

Apart from this finding in Student-Focused Planning the other challenges met by the secondary special educators in this research include interpreting the assessment reports of their students because some of the reports are too subjective in nature.

In Student Development, the challenges that secondary special educators reported they faced were related to:

(a) Developing the student's career awareness. It was found that it is challenging for 2 secondary special educators to help students set realistic goals for themselves with regard to their future. Also, the prescribed curriculum given to the secondary special educators by the State was not flexible enough to allow for a lot of career awareness development for students with intellectual disabilities. 1 secondary special educator also felt that students with mild intellectual disabilities, who are 14 or 15 years usually, do not know what they want to do in the future and therefore developing career awareness in the student is difficult.

(b) Teaching of self-determination skills to students with profound intellectual disabilities, teaching of social skills and independent living and family skills were the other challenges that secondary special educators felt they experienced.

Therefore, a prescribed curriculum and the age of the student with intellectual disability and severity of the intellectual disability can be some of the reasons why secondary special educators feel challenged by certain roles relating to Student Development.

The specific challenges or difficulties relating to Interagency Collaboration and Family Involvement, that secondary special educators have reported they face in this

research is supported by literature on 'role ambiguity and competing responsibilities.' (The Council for Exceptional Children, 2000). Here it is stated that *'the role of the special educator has become fragmented and overwhelming. Special education teachers are expected to be teachers, consultants, collaborators, supervisors, counselors, and clerical personnel. As neither schools nor the profession defines the special education teacher's primary responsibility, they are expected to meet the often conflicting expectations of multiple parties: students, administrators, parents, other educators and the public.'*

In Interagency Collaboration, the challenges that secondary special educators reported they faced were related to cooperating with a team of professionals working together in order to help the student with intellectual disabilities plan for transition. In Family Involvement, the secondary special educators face challenges or difficulties dealing with parents. They often need to play the role of a counselor as they need to reason out situations with the parents and speak on behalf of the students. This is so because parents have the main say in choosing the student's future career and do not pay any attention to the wishes of the student, parents often have high expectations of their children as therefore pushes the child further even though he or she is not able to cope, and lastly parents show a lack of interest in the student's education and future

Thus, it can be seen that it is challenging for secondary special educators to be a mediator between parents and the student especially since she or he has very little say in the future employment possibilities of the student as parents have the main say.

In Programme Structure and Attributes, no specific challenges or difficulties were experienced by secondary special educators as they all referred to the new School Act which will come into effect in 2007. This new School Act will give more control to the secondary special educators in working out the curriculum, therefore making it more

flexible. However, one secondary special educator stated that she is sure problems will come and she just has to wait and see.

### **6.3 Rating the effectiveness of the teacher training programme.**

According to Morningstar et al (2005), it has been found that special education teachers feel unprepared in implementing and managing transition planning and services. Blanchett, 2001(cited in Morningstar et al., 2005, p.2) has found in a survey that '*almost half of the secondary special education teachers surveyed reported being unprepared to meet their student's transition needs.*' However, in this research it was found that 5 out of the 12 secondary special educators rated their teacher training as *good*. It was found that all of the 5 secondary special educators, who rated their teacher training as *good*, have been teaching for 20 years or more. Thus, their teacher training and their vast teaching experience added together may have led them to feel satisfied with their teacher training programme.

Another 5 of them rated their teacher training programme as *fair*. 4 out of the 5 secondary special educators who have chosen *fair* have been teaching for 15 years and less, whereas 1 has been teaching for 35 years. Thus, having a lot of teaching experience does not always result in being fully satisfied with one's teacher training programme.

At the two extremes it was found that 1 secondary special educator rated her teacher training programme as *excellent*, whereas another rated her teacher training programme as *poor*. The secondary special educator who rated her teacher training programme as *excellent* had completed a general education teacher training, and several other courses besides her completing her Masters in special education. This could be one of the reasons why she considered her teacher training to be *excellent* as she had considered it important to upgrade herself professionally while on the job. At the other end, the secondary special educator that rated her teacher training

programme as *poor* started a mainstream teacher course, but due to personal reasons was not able to complete it.

Thus, the results in this research show that the secondary special educators, on the whole, do not feel so '*poorly prepared*' to perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities.

On the basis of the interviews conducted 5 out of the 12 secondary special educators have rated their teacher training programme as either *fair* or *good*, have reported that what matters more is experience in the field. These secondary special educators reported learning much more on the job than they did from their teacher training programme. This finding is consistent with literature stating that '*... primary training takes place on-the-job rather than through comprehensive professional development.*' (Kochhar-Bryant, 2003; cited in Morningstar et al., 2005) Thus, in the view of these findings, the training for some secondary special educators does not stop after their teacher training programme but continues for them even while on the job. In the words of one secondary special educator who says she '*trains throughout her life to meet the individual needs of every child.*'

#### **6.4 Recommendations made by secondary special educators to improve their teacher training programme.**

Research has shown that teachers have stated that teacher training programmes should *focus less on philosophical, historical, and legal foundations of transition...*' (Morningstar et al. 2005), thereby implying there should be less theoretical knowledge in the training programme and more practical experience added into it. Knott & Asselin, 1999 (Cited in Morningstar et al. 2005) have stated that '*teachers have reported a general understanding of transition problems, issues, and legal mandates yet they note little understanding of and experience with interagency and adult services or how best to support families.*' This findings support the recommendations made by the secondary

special educators in this research. The recommendations made to improve the teacher training programme include the following:

- There should a balance between theory and practice in the teacher training programmes as the focus is too much on imparting theory and provides not enough practical experience.
- The teacher training programme should focus more on equipping teachers with the skills related to how to work with the parents of students with intellectual disabilities.
- The teacher training programme should equip teachers with the skills related to how to work with a team of professionals that are involved in helping the student make the transition from school to employment.

I too stated in Chapter 1 that my teacher training course had left me unprepared in dealing with the parents of my students.

Besides these recommendations, 1 secondary special educator felt that the teacher training programmes should provide teachers with indepth knowledge on subjects taught instead of giving them a general orientation of the subjects. However, in my opinion, the main purpose of a teacher training programme is to provide teachers with a wide knowledge base so that when they actually begin teaching, they are aware of a lot of relevant information.

#### **6.5 Support received by the secondary special educators from the school while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities.**

The results show that secondary special educators in this research receive support by the school, in the form of various courses offered to them so that they can upgrade themselves professionally and therefore can be in a better position to perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities more effectively.



Besides going for various relevant courses, secondary special educators reported that excursions to other schools in and outside the country helped them as well. As these excursions provided them with an opportunity to see how other teachers perform similar tasks, which they can implement in their own classrooms if it is possible.

Secondary special educators also reported that seeking assistance from colleagues at school, engaging in 'self study' by reading relevant literature from books or online and relying on 'improvisation' while on the job were some of the other strategies they used to help them perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities.

The choice on the part of secondary special educators to get support to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively is more of a personal choice. Based on the interviews conducted it was found that it is not compulsory in the 3 schools visited, for secondary special educators to upgrade themselves professionally. Therefore, it is up to them whether they feel it is important to seek the support or not. However, 9 out of the 12 secondary special educators took up the initiative to get the necessary support in order to perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities more effectively.

## **6.6 Recommendations.**

The results of this research reveal that the curriculum plays a role in determining whether secondary special educators perform certain transition-related roles and responsibilities or not. Thus, it is important to make the curriculum more flexible so that the secondary special educator can perform his or her roles and responsibilities. In the Czech Republic, there exists a new School Act which became law in the beginning of 2005, but which will be implemented in 2007. This new School Act will bring about '*substantial changes in school operations*' (Cedefopinfo about vocational training in Europe , 2005) as the law enables the teacher to have more control in



choosing and organizing subject matter and selecting methodological approaches for their classrooms. Thus, secondary special educators having more control over the making of the curriculum can enable them to perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities fully.

I agree with the recommendations made by the secondary special educators relating to their teacher training programme. They reported that the teacher training programmes should include more practical experience instead of focusing a lot on theory. Furthermore they stated that the training should equip teachers with the necessary skills in working with families and parents of students as well with the skills relating to working with a team of professionals. The latter recommendation is important as preparing students with intellectual disabilities for employment must be a team effort, based on people trusting and cooperating with each other always keeping in mind the student's needs and dignity.

Based on this research, I hope that specific transition related legislated related to students with disabilities can come into force in the Czech Republic as such legislation can help standardize transition-related services. And therefore in turn can be a step towards improving the employment opportunities for youth with intellectual disabilities.

The research findings show that out of the 12 secondary special educators interviewed, that 5 of them rated their teacher training programme as *fair*, whereas another 5 gave a rating of *good*. This finding leads me to recommend that even though the majority of the secondary special educators did not feel so '*poorly prepared*' to undertake their transition-related roles and responsibilities, there still exists a need to have a separate transition-related teacher training programme for them. Such a teacher training programme does not yet exist in the Czech Republic.

## *Chapter 6*

### **7. Conclusion**

This final chapter consists of 2 sections namely:

**7.1 A critical evaluation of the work undertaken, including possible areas of further inquiry, and**

**7.2 Implications of my research findings**

**7.1 A critical evaluation of the work undertaken, including possible areas of further inquiry.**

The main aim of this study was to find out what were the transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators while preparing youth with intellectual disabilities for employment. Furthermore, secondary special educators were also asked about the specific challenges or difficulties they faced while performing these transition-related roles and responsibilities. They were also asked to rate the effectiveness of their teacher training programme and make recommendations to improve their programme. And finally, they were asked to state what kind of support from the school they received to help them perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities more effectively.

I feel satisfied with the way in which my investigation turned out, despite its various limitations already mentioned earlier. However, looking back now at the research process, I realize that I would have liked to do two things differently:

- Firstly, I could have included several other stakeholders in this research for example the parents, and the special education teachers who are involved in preparing youth with intellectual disabilities for employment at a vocational level. The inclusion of these stakeholders, in my opinion is very important to this research as they can help to add various dimensions to the research findings. However, due to the lack of time and language barrier, these stakeholders could not be included in this research.
- And secondly, I could have also found out if as research says, these transition-related roles and responsibilities that are performed by secondary special educators do in fact improve the employment possibilities of students with intellectual disabilities.

Thus, future inquiry should examine transition-related roles and responsibilities of secondary special educators by involving other transition stakeholders in the research and by linking the performing of these transition-related roles and responsibilities to student outcomes.

The two research methods used in this study include a checklist and semi-structured interviews. These 2 methods I feel supported each other as it was only on the basis on the responses in the checklist, that the semi-structured interview could take place.

## **7.2 Implications of my research findings**

Through this research it has been found that although the Czech Republic does not have any specific transition related legislation for student with disabilities, there exists quite a high percentage of secondary special educators (i.e. overall 59% and above) who felt that they performed 20 out of the 23 transition-related roles and responsibilities while preparing students with intellectual disabilities for

employment. Whereas, 42% and below of the secondary special educators felt they performed the remaining 3 roles.

The findings of this research also reveal the specific challenges or difficulties that secondary special educators experience while performing their transition-related roles and responsibilities. 5 out of the 12 secondary special educators rated their teacher training programme as *good* and another 5 gave a rating of *fair*. Thus, majority of the secondary special educators in this research did not feel so poorly prepared to perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities.

And lastly, the findings of this research reveal the various recommendations given by secondary special educators for their teacher training programme and support they received from the school in order to perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities effectively.

It was interesting for me as a special educator to learn about the above mentioned findings. They provided me with useful insights into real life challenges faced by the secondary special educators while preparing youth with intellectual disabilities for employment. It was good to find that contrary to research done, these secondary special educators did not feel their teacher training programme left them very '*poorly prepared*' to perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities.

I learnt from the research findings that training to educate students with intellectual disabilities did not stop at their teacher training programme, but continued throughout their lives. I also learnt that besides the support provided by the school, secondary special educators also find several ways to support themselves so that they can perform their transition-related roles and responsibilities effectively.

India too does not have any specific transition related legislation for student with disabilities and therefore similar research in special schools can be undertaken in order to improve employment possibilities for students with intellectual disabilities in India as well. Such research endeavors can hopefully pave the way for the developing of transition-related policies at government level in order to standardize transition-related services.

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## Appendices

### Checklist (in Czech)

Datum:

Žena/muž

Vzdělání:

Prosím zaškrtněte body, které považujete za svou roli (které patří do Vaší odpovědnosti) s ohledem na každou z pěti kategorií:

#### PLÁNOVÁNÍ ZAMĚŘENÉ NA STUDENTA

1. Ztotožnit se a zaznamenávat styly učení žáka, jeho cíle do budoucnosti a individuální potřeby např. v případě žáka se sluchovým či zrakovým postižením, kde by měl sedět, že je potřeba zvětšit písmo atd.
2. Užívat zjištěných informací (spec.ped. a psych. vyšetření) při vytváření IVP.
3. Vyvinout měřitelné cíle související s budoucím povoláním.
4. Vytvořit osnovy, které korespondují s úkoly po škole (povolání).
5. Zahrnout v IVP praxi/praktické předměty, které mohou žáci později využít ve svém zaměstnání.
6. Poskytovat možnost žákům a rodinám zapojit se tranzitního plánování.
7. Ohodnotit zda žák dosáhl cílů či ne.

#### ROZVOJ ŽÁKŮ

1. Učit „akademické“ dovednosti související s reálnými životními zkušenostmi.
2. Učit osobnostní dovednosti (dělat rozhodnutí atd., sebeprosazování)
3. Učit sociální dovednosti pro školu i práci.
4. Učit učební strategie a studijní dovednosti.
5. Rozvoj žákova kariérního uvědomění si.
6. Modifikovat a měnit prostředí studenta, tak aby vyhovovalo jeho potřebám.



7. Učit nezávislosti a běžným životním (rodinným) dovednostem.
8. Poskytovat studentům někoho, kdo je školí a provází.

## SPOLUPRÁCE MEZI INSTITUCEMI

1. Vytvářet kontakt a spolupráci s navazující školou (výchovným poradcem) či zaměstnavatelem.
2. Poskytovat informace (hodnocení, výsledky vyšetření) dalším institucím se souhlasem rodičů a žáků.

## ZAHRNUTÍ RODINY

1. Poskytovat rodině informace o přechodu studenta (o tranzitních službách) do jiné instituce.
2. Zahrnout rodiče do plánování a rozhodování.
3. Dbát na to, aby se rodiče účastnili schůzek týkající se budoucnosti jejich dětí.

## STRUKTURA PROGRAMU A VLASTNOSTI

1. Plánovat osnovy, které jsou flexibilní a sledují potřeby žáka.
2. Plánovat osnovy, které připraví žáka na život po škole.
3. Zahrnout vývoj a ohodnocení osnov.

Do jaké míry vás vaše vzdělání připravilo nést tyto role a zodpovědnosti? Prosím ohodnot'te na následující stupnici.

výborný, znamenitý      prospěšný, užitečný      dobrý, slušný      špatný, bezvýznamný

## **Checklist (in English)**

**Date:**

**Gender: M / F**

**Qualification:**

**Please tick the box that you consider to be your role and responsibility with regard each of the five categories:**

### **STUDENT-FOCUSED PLANNING**

1. Identify and keep a record of students learning styles, post school goals and need for accommodation.
2. Use assessment information to make the Individual Education Plan for the student.
3. Develop measurable transition related goals.
4. Develop curricular that links/ corresponds with post school objectives.
5. Include transition related services in the Individual Education Plan.
6. Provide opportunities for the student and family to be involved in the transition planning.
7. Evaluate whether students have reached the goals or have not.

### **STUDENT DEVELOPMENT**

1. Teach academic skills that are related to the student's real life experience.
2. Teach self determination skills.
3. Teach social skills for school and work.
4. Teach learning strategies and study skills.
5. Develop student's career awareness.
6. Modify or change student's environment to suit his/her needs.
7. Teach independent living and family living skills.
8. Provide student's with a staff member who can train and guide them.

## **INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION**

1. Make contact and interact with service providers (e.g. employers) to inform them of student's needs and support required?
2. Provide assessment information to the service providers with permission of parents and students?

## **FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

1. Provide the family with information about transition services being provided.
2. Involve parents in planning and decision making process.
3. Make sure the parents attend meetings that are related to their child's future.

## **PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND ATTRIBUTES**

1. Plan curricular that is flexible and meets the student's needs.
2. Plan curricular that prepares a student for life after school.
3. Involved in development and evaluation of curricular.

To what extent do you feel your teacher training prepared you to carry out these roles and responsibilities? Please rate teacher training as *excellent, good, fair or poor*.

### Interview 5 (Sample)

16/6

Researcher: what are some of the challenges or difficulties do you face in this area?

I: All kinds of relationships, relationships between the students themselves, between the classes as well the relationship between the school and the surroundings because it is not closed in itself and needs to be related to people outside school.

R: and with regard to the second one (SD) her reasons for not ticking the certain areas

I: She doesn't teach strategies she uses strategies

R: the strategies she uses to help the children learn

I: these strategies are so simple she wouldn't call them strategies they are just simple methods

I: it is probably out of the question number five

R: they do not do any career awareness?

I: yes not in her class.

R: Do you expose the child to certain areas that might lead to a certain kind of employment in your class?

I: So very simply yes we try to find out what they like doing, if they help at home with the parents, what kind of work they like so we try to find out their hobbies and then consequently we find out what kind of job they would like to do.

R: ok. What are some of the challenges she faces in this area? (SD)

I: She doesn't have any problem in this area because she realizes that there are some other schools where students have to be aware of there career but it is not in her class. The range of the disabilities is very wide.

R: does she experience and personal difficulties with regard to these roles which she does? (SD)

I: Sometimes she experiences the problem when the student changes the class when he must adapt to the different levels of the class. Or sometimes problems with parents because they see their child in a different way than they do (teachers) Usually much higher...

R: have more expectations?

I: yes absolutely. So then they have to explain to the parents that they should be realistic.

R: So in this area she is on contact with whom? (IC)

I: they are usually in contact with the educational advisor of each school for example if a student gets transferred to this school (practical school) they usually contact the school before.

R: so they teacher is in contact with the educational advisor?

I: yes there is usually a educational advisor or specialist in each school. So they usually contact him before and discuss.

R: are there any difficulties in this area? (IC)

I: No.

R: and in this area? (FI)

I: she feels both teachers and parents are grateful for being here so she doesn't have any problems. And they like to cooperate with the school and they take it as a great help for the families. There are some exceptions but they are so few that she wouldn't speak about it. Generally speaking there are no problem.

I: So talking about parent meetings they have two meetings a year she can see some parents everyday because they come here and communicate out of note book and they write some messages to the parent and of course if it is applicable she advises them about the career, what kind of jobs should they take up.

I: But if it is an urgent problem then they solve the problem that very day.

R: and in the last area?

I: That is what I mainly do in my job. My work basically involves the planning of curriculum. According to the new Education Act we are going to be responsible for the syllabus of the school from the year 2007.

R: so would you think that you as a teacher would like to add this area (Career awareness) into the syllabus as you will have more freedom?

I: So definitely she would like to incorporate this element into the syllabus but she thinks at present it is there now because for example she mentioned this one year study very practical program where they learn how to repair small things, girls learn how to cook, so she thinks it is very important but it is very individual and depends on each child and ability.

R: and any challenges she faces with regard to 1 and 3 in PSA?

I: She feels it will be very challenging when they will have to work out the syllabus (in 2007) because this school has such a wide scope of educational systems, we were talking about it earlier. It would be very difficult to put them together the rehabilitation/helping/vocational.

R: to put it all into 1 syllabus?

I: yes on the other hand she feels it is good as all the children will be integrated so one helps another and it is much better for the atmosphere.

R: so right now they function as different parts in the educational system?

I: there are different sections in the educational system which is bad for working out the syllabus but good for the corporation and atmosphere in the school.

I: She says the school is small, not many children and she finds it as a type of family and the atmosphere help students to communicate with each other much better in a normal mainstream school.

R: and the last question can she elaborate on her choice? (TT)

I: She feels it is a different situation compared with her colleague he studied special pedagogy at University and then he started teaching immediately. She used to be a kindergarten teacher and later she got some education about special pedagogy and then she could see this education from a different point of view. How practical can it be because she has already had some experience with teaching before and then she did her course.

R: she could see when she was studying how useful something can be for her future but something's she feels were not relevant.

R: Like?

I: She thinks very thing was useful but it wasn't a practical preparation for the job.

R: it was more theory? Yes.

R: So which area does she feel her education helped her the most?

Director: This school is first this type in this region. And when we established this school teachers in University don't know real situation because before children who are now in this school was called non abled to educate so teacher here in the beginning has more experience here in this school than University. Now situation is much better.

R: but I want to ask her which areas she feels the training helped her?

R: so the education helped her understand why a student behaves the way he does but cannot give her any practical methodology how to cope with these situations.

R: and what support did she receive that helped her carryout these roles adequately?

I: She attended many seminars. And self study according to his or her field of interest.



Datum: 16. 6

Žena/muž

Vzdělání: SPECIÁLNÍ PEDAGOG

Prosím zaškrtněte body, které považujete za svou roli (které patří do Vaší odpovědnosti) s ohledem na každou z pěti kategorií:

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- ☒ 2. Užívat zjištěných informací (spec.ped. a psych. vyšetření) při vytváření IVP.
- ☒ 3. Vyvinout měřitelné cíle související s budoucím povoláním.
- ☒ 4. Vytvořit osnovy, které korespondují s úkoly po škole (povolání).
5. Zahrnout v IVP praxi/praktické předměty, které mohou žáci později využít ve svém zaměstnání.
- ☒ 6. Poskytovat možnost žákům a rodinám zapojit se tranzitního plánování.
- ☒ 7. Ohodnotit zda žák dosáhl cílů či ne.

#### ROZVOJ ŽÁKŮ

- ☒ 1. Učit „akademické“ dovednosti související s reálnými životními zkušenostmi.
- ☒ 2. Učit osobnostní dovednosti (dělat rozhodnutí atd., sebeprosazování)
- ☒ 3. Učit sociální dovednosti pro školu i práci.
4. Učit učební strategie a studijní dovednosti.
5. Rozvoj žákova kariérního uvědomění si.
- ☒ 6. Modifikovat a měnit prostředí studenta, tak aby vyhovovalo jeho potřebám.
- ☒ 7. Učit nezávislosti a běžným životním (rodinným) dovednostem.

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#### SPOLUPRÁCE MEZI INSTITUCEMI

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- ② Poskytovat informace (hodnocení, výsledky vyšetření) dalším institucím se souhlasem rodičů a žáků.

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- ② Zahrnout rodiče do plánování a rozhodování.
- ③ Dbát na to, aby se rodiče účastnili schůzek týkající se budoucnosti jejich dětí.

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- ③ Zahrnout vývoj a ohodnocení osnov.

Do jaké míry vás vaše vzdělání připravilo nést tyto role a zodpovědnosti? Prosím ohodnoťte na následující stupnici.

výborný, znamenitý    prospěšný, užitečný    dobrý, slušný    špatný, bezvýznamný